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BOOKS

By K. A. ABBAS

OUTSIDE INDIA

LET INDIA FIGHT FOR FREEDOM

TOMORROW IS OURS

. . . AND ONE DID NOT COME BACK

By N. G. JOG

WILL WAR COME TO INDIA ?

ONIONS & OPINIONS

INDIA : CHURCHILL'S BLINDSPOT

(in Press)

A REPORT TO GANDHIJI



All eyes on him.

[May 1944]

A REPORT TO GANDHIJI

*A SURVEY OF INDIAN AND WORLD
EVENTS DURING THE 21 MONTHS
OF GANDHIJ'S INCARCERATION*

BY
K. A. ABBAS

AND
N. G. JOG

Cartoons by SHANKAR



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PUBLISHERS : BOMBAY

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The authors modestly call this book *A Report to Gandhiji*. It is no doubt a report of the many tragic and historic events which happened during the 21 months of Gandhiji's incarceration. But it is also a record of the reactions of two well-known journalists. It is objective but not in the sense of being dry-as-dust. It is a brilliant analysis of the present political and economic situation. Every event from the nation-wide disturbances of 1942 to the 10,000 crore Tata-Birla plan of 1944 is dealt with in an incisive style—without fear or favour. It will provoke everybody to think—and maybe some to hit back.

It is the book of the hour in which thousands of readers will see their own innermost thoughts and feelings mirrored. None the less it will serve as a faithful record of two epoch-making years.

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First published, 1944

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THAT DAY !	1
II. THE WORLD BACKGROUND	8
III. ' WHAT THESE EYES OF MINE HAVE SEEN '	15
IV. ' POSTERITY WILL JUDGE '	25
V. BENGAL'S DANCE OF DEATH	33
VI. WITHIN THE BORDER	43
VII. THE HOUSE THAT JINNAH BUILT	51
VIII. ALL THAT MONEY CAN BUY !	60
IX. MAKE GANDHI THE ALLY OF THE ALLIES !	71

CHAPTER I

THAT DAY !

*When Justice seals the gates of heaven and hell
The rest—that day, that day alone, will tell.*

—JAMES MONTGOMERY

The day was like any other August day in Bombay—humid and sultry, the overcast sky full of the threat of a rain-storm.

A storm did break that day—over the whole of India, sweeping away many of the assumptions and illusions of Indian politics. There was lightning and thunder and a tempest of angry emotion. History will compute the total damage, but at least one thing was shattered beyond repair—India's faith in Britain !

The previous day, August 8, 1942, had ended in an atmosphere of impending battle. The Congress had delivered an ultimatum to the British Government. 'Quit India !' The two words had summed up five decades of struggle. It was the crescendo of a long symphony, which had begun on a plaintive note but which had gradually developed into a more aggressive, fighting tune, with clash of cymbals and beating of war-drums.

And yet somehow the tradition of Indo-British conflict had been too 'gentlemanly' and staid to expect an immediate flare-up. Everyone realized that this was the final phase of the struggle. But before it was launched there would be the usual exchange of politely-worded letters between Gandhiji and the Viceroy, perhaps a few personal interviews. A Gandhi-Jinnah meeting was said to be on the tapis. Cables and letters were being sent to the leaders of the Allied nations—to Roosevelt and Stalin and Chiang—explaining to them that if the Congress was forced to launch a non-violent struggle, it was meant not to hurt their cause but rather to strengthen it by removing the bonds of imperialism which prevented India from freely participating in the anti-Fascist struggle. Nehru was scheduled

to broadcast to America the very next day. There were possibilities of Roosevelt's intervention, of Chiang acting as a mediator between India and Britain. The next few days would be full of international *pourparlers*, of last-minute peace efforts. Only when all these failed would the call to arms (in this case non-violent arms !) be sounded. Gandhiji had been appointed the sole Commander and no doubt he would devise some novel and effective strategy. Would there be another spectacular Dandi March ? Or a No-Tax Campaign ? Boycott of schools and colleges and courts ? A General Strike ? He had not revealed what it would be ; perhaps he himself had not yet decided what it should be.

Events moved fast during the night of August 8-9 like the climax of a cinema thriller. At 10-30 p.m. the historic session of the All-India Congress Committee came to an end after passing what has come to be known as the 'Quit India' resolution. A flash went on the wires (or perhaps wireless) straight to the Viceregal Lodge in New Delhi where the Executive Council was constantly in session. 'It has come, boys,' said Lord Linlithgow (or words to that effect), rising to his full height and speaking with solemn deliberation befitting a moment of crisis in the history of the Empire. 'Let them have it !' An invisible switch was pressed and the great machinery of Law and Order, always geared for action, was immediately set in motion. Before midnight the Bombay police had received detailed instructions. By one a.m. a mysterious special train was ready at the Victoria Terminus station. At one-thirty reporters in newspaper offices got the first scent of danger when they found the telephone lines 'dead'. This had happened only once before, many years ago, when Gandhiji was arrested. Was history repeating itself ?

The police struck at dawn ! Gandhiji, members of the Working Committee and all other important Congressmen present in Bombay were arrested. By 7-30 they had been put on the special train and sent to an unknown destination. Simultaneously arrests of prominent Congress workers were started all over India. In Bombay a Congress volunteer rally, announced the previous day, was dispersed with lathis and tear-gas. Armed police patrolled the streets. Troops stood by in readiness.

This was how August 9, 1942, dawned over Bombay and many other cities in India.

Just as a seed has within it in miniature all the characteristics of the tree it one day would be, so did August 9, 1942, contain all the indications of future developments. Seen in retrospect, it is amazing how many significant reactions this single day produced both in India and abroad.

The complacency and stupidity and callous cynicism of the British policy with regard to India, pursued during the last 21 fateful months, could be read in the words Mr Amery broadcast from London on August 9, 1942 :

‘By their prompt and resolute action the Government of India have saved India and the Allied cause from a grave disaster. There may yet be a certain measure of trouble. It is too early to speak with any assurance but I believe it will not be trouble that cannot be dealt with by the Government of India through police and courts.’

The crisis in India this time was closely related to the international situation.

Later on, British propagandists in America and American apologists for the British Empire were to declare that India was a domestic issue of Britain. But on August 9, 1942, it was more than manifest that by raising the issue of Indian Independence, Gandhiji and the Congress had challenged the very fundamentals of Allied war aims and peace aims. Within a few hours of the leaders’ arrests, news of the foreign reactions and repercussions began to be received. A London message said the Soviet Consulate was still waiting for the text of the resolution which the Congress was reported to have cabled to Ambassador Maisky for transmission to Stalin. A copy of the resolution was personally handed to the Commissioners for the United States and China in New Delhi to be forwarded to their respective governments.

The Chinese reaction was prompt and characteristically sympathetic. A Chungking cable with the August 9 dateline reported a suggestion that ‘a Pacific Charter giving assurances about the future of India, China, Burma and Korea might prove helpful,’ made by the Director of the Chinese Political Department, Mr T. F. Tsiang, former Ambassador to Moscow, member of the Executive Yuan and Minister without Portfolio,

when speaking specifically on the attitude of China's Government towards the Indian situation. The same spokesman further stated : 'The Chinese Government is a friend and ally of Britain, while the Chinese people have the warmest friendship for the Indian people. Even at this late hour, I hope some method will be found to improve the situation in India. *If there is anything China can do, she will be glad to do it.*'

Considering how guarded the language of diplomats must always be, this looks like a clear offer on behalf of China to mediate between the Congress and Lord Linlithgow. If and when the behind-the-scenes history of the last 21 months can be written, we are sure Marshal Chiang Kai-Shek's repeated attempts to use his good offices to resolve the Indian deadlock will come to light.

On August 9, the editor of the notoriously imperialist London *Times* sat down and wrote a leading article, perhaps more out of grief than anger, in which he declared : 'It is a startling commentary not on the sincerity but on the sense of reality and proportion of the Congress leaders.' Later this very sincerity was to be doubted and assailed ; but on that day even the *Times* had not the temerity to accuse Congress leaders of lack of faith. Nor had it then acquired the vicious pungency that characterized the editor's later writings. The British and American press, blindly following the lead given by Mr Amery had already begun deliberately to misunderstand and misrepresent the August resolution. The more yellow papers which had prepared the ground with fantastic perversions like 'Gandhi's India-Jap Peace Plan' now came out with the 'Stab In The Back' accusation against the Congress.

It required, therefore, the courage of a real socialist like Mr W. Dobbie, M.P., to write to the *News Chronicle* on August 9 :

'The Congress resolution asks Britain to renounce her power of domination over India. The Indian National Congress wants Britain to declare that we have no more right to rule over India and exploit her politically and economically for our ends, as we have undoubtedly done in the past. Such declaration is not impossible to make even in the midst of the war, and it will go a long way to strengthen our military position.'

Emphasizing the anti-fascist record of Indian leaders, he declared his conviction that they would never submit to Japan, and concluded :

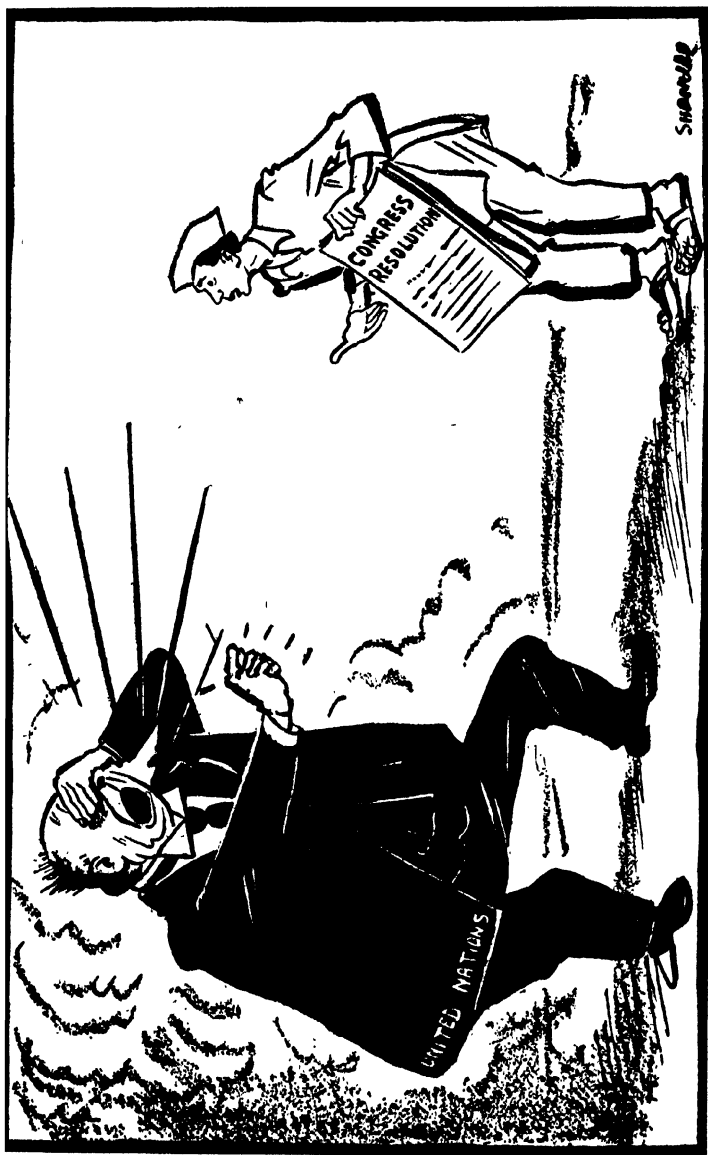
‘ Cannot Britain and its unquestioned voice, the Prime Minister, declare to the world that India is the land of Indians and Britain has renounced her right to hold India by force of arms, in accordance with the spirit of the Atlantic Charter ? ’

It was months later that Britain’s ‘ unquestioned voice ’ answered with an emphatic ‘ No ’ when Premier Churchill made his Mansion House speech and affirmed : ‘ We Mean To Hold Our Own ! ’

The one voice that was silent on August 9, 1942, was the voice of Sir Stafford Cripps. Was it conscience ?

Whatever might be said about the wisdom or folly of the Congress resolution, it was clear on August 9, 1942, that the Congress had boldly stepped into the centre of the world stage and challenged the conscience of humanity. The spotlight of world attention was focussed on India. The arrest of Indian leaders was the front-page story in every newspaper—from *Pravda* to *Chicago Daily News* ! It was like the opening of a Second Front, and foreign correspondents were seen rushing about the streets of Indian cities to ‘ cover ’ this most amazing situation. News editors in London and New York and Chicago were frantically asking for more and more ‘ copy ’ and the correspondents were filing thousands of words every day—as much as the censors would allow.

It was not a situation that would appeal to the leaders of the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha, jealous as they were of the spectacular initiative taken by the Congress. The Communists, in spite of their opposition to the ‘ Quit India ’ resolution held meetings to protest against the arrest of national leaders ; and the Liberals deplored the Government action in lengthy statements. Not so the Qaid-e-Azam and the gallant Vir. ‘ I deeply regret,’ declared Mr Jinnah in a statement issued on August 9, ‘ that the Congress has finally declared war and has launched a most dangerous mass movement in spite of numerous warnings and advices from various individuals, parties and organizations in this country.’ His first reaction was that of a horrified Constitutionalist. ‘ It is



The world refused to face the challenge.

[August 1942]

impossible to believe that the Congress leaders were not fully alive to the fact that such a movement will result not only in violence but bloodshed and destruction of innocent people.' But he would not be true to his tradition if he did not give every situation a communal turn to his own advantage. 'It is to be deplored all the more that this movement is launched at this critical juncture and with the object of forcing their demands at the point of bayonet which, if conceded with a view to pacify the Congress' arrogant attitude, and averting the challenge, thrown so wantonly by them, will mean complete surrender and sacrifice of all other interests and particularly those of Muslim India. . . . I appeal to the Mussalmans to keep aloof from this movement and not to surrender to the threats and intimidations of the Congress workers. . . . I also solemnly warn the Congress and Congress workers not to interfere, molest, harass or picket the Mussalmans. . . . Any attempt to force the Mussalmans will lead to very grave situation.'

In almost identical words, though somewhat in a minor key, Mr Savarkar asked the Hindus to keep away from the Congress :

'The inevitable has happened. . . . It is my duty to call upon all Hindu Mahasabhis particularly, and Hindus generally, not to extend any active support to the resolution and to abstain from any action which is meant and calculated to back up the resolution and the present policy of the Congress.'

Many voices, in varying accents, spoke on that day—August 9, 1942—and many voices were drowned in the crack of lathis falling on skulls, in the vicious whine of flying bullets. As the night fell, a gloomy voice came from the South. It was Rajagopalachariar, the erstwhile exponent of Gandhism and the lonely new prophet of compromise.

'My words have fallen on deaf ears both on my colleagues and on the British Government. Repression of Congress, even if successful does not solve the problem of the defence of India. Without a united people's close co-operation behind the State, the defence of India is slippery.'

It was the voice of a disillusioned, defeated man, and it sounded hollow and almost pathetic in the stillness of the black night, that had descended upon India.

CHAPTER II

THE WORLD BACKGROUND

'If Britain is really sincere about her war aims, she should at once declare India free.'

—HITLER

As for India, so for the rest of the world, August 1942 was a month of destiny. The fortunes of the Allies had reached their nadir in the last month of the second year of war. The goosestepping Nazi legions were approaching the outskirts of Stalingrad and the oil-wells of the Caucasus. Mussolini was paying a visit to Rommel's headquarters at El Alamein in the hope of making a ceremonial entry into Alexandria—which was barely 70 miles away—at the head of the victorious Axis army. The agile Jap forces had overrun most of south-east Asia and south-west Pacific with incredible speed and were knocking on the gates of India as well as of Australia. In its moments of anguish the democratic world remembered the grim words of Hitler : *The year 1942 shall bring a victorious decision for our people, and for the nations allied with us !*

The various Axis offensives were vital links of a well-knit global strategy. Von Bock's drive to the Caucasus was no doubt intended in the first place to seize its oil-wells and thus finally to cripple the Red Army which had already lost the wheat of the Ukraine, the coal of the Don basin, the iron ore of Krivoi Rog and the manganese of Nikopol. But it also represented one mighty arm of a gigantic pincer, the other being Rommel's drive to Egypt. In August 1942 it seemed as if both these drives would succeed. 'Greased Lightning' Rommel shouted exultantly that the gateway to Egypt was within his grasp, while his Fuehrer had publicly vowed to capture Stalingrad.

This pincer was to close somewhere on the shores of the Caspian and the combined armies of Bock and Rommel were thereafter to march eastwards so as to shake hands with the



Churchill claims that the affairs of Britain are proceeding on superior levels of smooth and democratic progress.

Japanese army driving westwards from Burma. It was a more ambitious undertaking than the old *Drang nach Osten* (Drive to the East). Hitler would not be content like Kaiser William II with marching from Berlin to Baghdad. His greedy eyes were perhaps already fixed on Delhi, the historic goal of all world-conquerors. He, Adolf Hitler, would achieve what even Napoleon had failed to do !

There was complete unanimity among the members of the Axis regarding their master-plan of world overlordship. There seemed to be, however, an ill-concealed difference of opinion regarding the exact site of the junction between the western and the eastern Axis. The Tokyo warlords had always marked India as their own exclusive sphere of operations. It was even included in the new maps of the Japanese Empire. Tojo would have felt cheated of his rightful prize, if Hitler had goose-stepped to Hindustan and founded a ninth Nazi Delhi ! While therefore Tojo's spokesmen were warmly prophesying the fall of Stalingrad and Alexandria during Minister Lyttleton's famous '80 days of danger', they subtly extended their co-prosperity sphere to include the Arab countries and named the Persian Gulf as the rendezvous of victory ! Apart from dropping a broad hint to the Fuehrer, this was also doing the ex-Duce in the eye, for he had long ago taken the Arabs ostentatiously under his wings and proclaimed himself to be the Protector of Islam !

India was thus the focal point in August 1942 not merely of the democratic but also of the Fascist world. The former stood bewildered, aghast at the tragic turn of events in this country while the latter must have gleefully welcomed it as a God-sent propaganda weapon in their hands : 'Look at the self-declared champions of democracy and freedom putting behind prison bars, without a show of trial, men like Gandhi and Nehru, whose sole crime was to demand democracy and freedom for their motherland.' Japan particularly extended its warm sympathies to Indians and pressed its invitation to them to walk into its cosy co-prosperity parlour. 'The Japanese are ready to smash every known military facility (sic) in India,' ran a notorious Tokyo broadcast. 'The Japanese can and will crush the British troops at any time they desire.'

Fortunately for India and for the rest of the world, all these

grandiloquent boasts remained unfulfilled. The Axis conquests had reached the high-water mark in August 1942 and since then the tide has been turning slowly but inexorably. The British as well as the Russians proverbially fight their best when their backs are to the wall. 'Not one step back' was the Order of the Day issued to the Red Army by Marshal Stalin early in August. 'Not one step back' was also the desperate determination of General Auchinleck, who after a disastrous retreat over the Western Desert, had dug himself in at El Alamein. 'Not one step back' said General MacArthur to himself, though he must have wondered how he could help it, with the scanty resources which were then available in Australia. And 'Not one step back' must have hoped General Wavell also, as the monsoon bogged the Japs on the north-eastern frontier of India !

And there has not been one step back anywhere on the far-flung battlefields except—as irony would have it !—in India itself, where as late as last March 15 the Jap Army infiltrated into the hills and valleys which separate India from Burma, cut the Manipur road, which was built so laboriously during the last two years as the spring-board of the Allied offensive into Burma and for some time imperilled the mainland itself. But here, too, it must be pointed out, there have been two steps forward to counterbalance the one step backward. A considerable part of Northern Burma has already been occupied by General Stilwell's Sino-American forces and once Myitkyina and Mogaung have been captured, the Burma Road itself will have been opened. It will be a symbolic achievement.

Let us, however, go back to August 1942. For nearly three months, thereafter, the fortunes of war hung precariously in the balance. Rommel made an abortive attempt at the end of that month to break through to the Nile valley, while Bock's offensive actually forged ahead towards the Caspian in spite of the fierce Russian resistance. It fell to the lot of General Alexander (who had succeeded General Auchinleck) to strike the first note in the Allied symphony of triumph. On the full-moon night of October 23, 1942 the Eighth Army delivered a smashing blow on the Afrika Korps from which it never recovered. This offensive was supplemented by an Anglo-American landing on the shores of French north-west

Africa on November 7. The entire Axis army in Africa was thus caught in the jaws of a nut-cracker. Its annihilation was certain and it only remained to be seen how long it would take. It speaks much for the superb generalship, first of Rommel and next of Arnim, that after they recovered from the first shock, they transformed their inevitable rout into a magnificent rearguard action. Every natural obstacle such as El Agheila, Wadi Zem Zem and the hilly terrain of Tunisia, as also man-made fortifications like the Mareth Line, were exploited to the full and it was not until May 13, 1943 that the last German army surrendered and *finis* was written to the war in Africa. The Axis casualties amounted to nearly a million ; the third Roman Empire lay in the dust along with the Nazi myth of invincibility.

That particular myth, however, had already received the *coup de grace* at Stalingrad where after one of the bitterest fights in history, the Red Army turned the tables completely on the *Wehrmacht*. The surrender of von Paulus, the commander of the German Sixth Army, on the last day of January 1943 marked the climax of a saga of defence, as also the opening of one of the most sustained and massive counter-offensives in the annals of warfare. Indeed, that counter-offensive has been like a mighty ocean wave which is sweeping ahead even when it may appear stationary. It has not lost its initial momentum though its tempo may vary and it may pass through periodic lulls. It has kept the Germans on the *qui vive* all along the 2,000-mile front, and often caught them on the wrong foot.

Starting from the Volga and the Caucasus in the winter of 1942, the Red Army has swept across rivers and mountains, steppes and swamps, put to flight nearly 200 German and satellite divisions, destroyed at least half of them, liberated hundreds of thousands square miles of territory, until in the summer of 1944 it stands along the Pruth and the Sereth and on the slopes of the Carpathians, ready to strike wherever it chooses on the eastern periphery of *Festung Europa*. Except on the northern and part of the central front, the Fatherland is entirely freed from the hoof of the Nazi beast.

The world has showered unstinted admiration on the Red Army for its succession of extraordinary victories. But it has

not always been mindful of the colossal sacrifices made by the Russian people during the last three years of war. Its war casualties long ago passed the five million mark, which may be compared to the 667,159 suffered by the whole of the British Empire in the first four years of war. The civilian casualties of Russia perhaps can never be accurately estimated. Wherever the Nazis went, they perpetrated unspeakable cruelties, even systematic massacres and while retreating they left the whole landscape razed and burnt. We hear much of total war but it can be seen only in the Soviet in its totality. The Russians are not only dying in the war ; they are also living for it. Their entire being pulsates with a single thought : *Death to the Nazi invader !*

Let us return from Russia to Africa which, in May 1943, was transformed from an Axis bastion into an Allied spring-board into the Mediterranean. The Allies invaded Sicily in July and the Italian mainland itself in September 1943. In between occurred the most sensational event of the war—the collapse of the Duce and the capitulation of King Victor. The Allies, however, were unable to exploit these happenings as they should have done and though they captured southern Italy quickly enough, they were tied down to a prolonged stalemate in central Italy, which was broken only in the second week of May 1944. The tactics of Marshal Kesselring, the German commander in Italy, were identical with those of Rommel—to fight for space to gain time—and he achieved an even more striking success from this standpoint.

Why did Hitler sacrifice half a million soldiers in Africa and Sicily ? Because he wanted to put his defences in the fortress of Europe ready for the second front, to raise an impregnable wall of steel and concrete all along the Atlantic coast. That second front has been coming, coming—ever since August 1942. From being merely a wishful thought then, it has become twenty-one months later a confident forecast !¹ This is not much of a progress but the second front has been very much in the public mind all these days. It has been the central factor of the strategy of all the belligerents

1. The news of the Allied invasion of France came while these pages were being printed.

for two years now. Even Japan, which is not directly affected by the second front, realizes that the longer it is postponed, the further her own hour of retribution.

Nevertheless in some ways the Allied bombing of Germany and occupied Europe does constitute a sort of second front, as Stalin himself once admitted. The first 1,000-bomber raid over Germany was considered a marvel of strength and organization. Now three or four times that number wing over the open roof of the fortress of Europe and release their deadly load over vital targets, as a matter of daily routine. The air equivalent of one infantry division thus 'invades' Europe every day. In April 1944 Anglo-American air force dropped 96,000 tons of bombs over Europe, which can be compared with the 55,000 tons dropped by the Luftwaffe, in all the ten months of the 1940-41 air blitz over Britain.

Allied supremacy of the air has played a vital role in the operations in the south-west Pacific, too. General MacArthur's operations have been conducted mainly under the cover of an air umbrella, though he has cleverly utilized the two other arms as well. It was in August 1942 that he started his return trip to Tokyo with an attack on Guadalcanal in the Solomon group of islands. The island-hopping process proved extremely slow and laborious during the first year but its main strategic purpose—the elimination of the Jap threat to Australia—has been won. Since the beginning of this year the operations have been appreciably quickened and also supplemented by synchronized blows in the central Pacific delivered by Admiral Nimitz.

The occupation of the Biak Island off the tip of New Guinea which is proceeding at present can be said to complete the first phase of Allied strategy in the Pacific. Now it is the Allies who are poised for an invasion of the Philippines—which is less than 900 miles away from Biak—and the Dutch East Indies. The losses suffered by the Japs in the south-west Pacific since the beginning of the war make significant reading : 250,000 men, 272 ships and 5,245 planes. General MacArthur and Admiral Nimitz have been hitting where it hurt Tojo most—his shipping and air force !

It is thus a far cry from August 1942 to June 1944. During this period the Allies have passed from the defensive to the

offensive. They have firmly seized the initiative and are ready to strike the final blows to the Axis. They have closed up their own ranks and the succession of conferences held in 1943—Casablanca, Quebec, Moscow, Cairo, and Teheran—have created a new sense of comradeship and understanding among the leaders of the 33 United Nations and especially among the Big Four. The forces of democracy and freedom have triumphed everywhere—everywhere except India, though her sons, too, have laid down their lives on a score of battlefields and though her percentage of casualties is only next to that of Britain among the armies of the various countries of the British Empire. Most of Russia, the whole of North Africa, half of Fascist Italy itself are freed from totalitarian tyranny. The threat to Australia is finally removed and she has even begun a partial demobilization of her army. Against this heartening world background India alone stands exactly where she did on that fateful day in August 1942—her leaders behind prison bars and the enemy on the border ! Nay ! He is now actually within the border !

CHAPTER III

‘WHAT THESE EYES OF MINE HAVE SEEN . . .’

*‘He (the “goonda”) gets away with his crimes
When police and troops come,
And the innocent suffer.’*

—Government’s ‘Fight Goondas’ advertisement

‘The Government goaded the people to the point of madness. They started leonine violence in the shape of the arrests. . . . I cannot interpret in any other manner the repressive measures of the all-powerful Government of India.’

—GANDHIJI in his letter to Lord Linlithgow

History alone will decide whether the happenings in India on August 9, 1942, and on succeeding days—the many acts of violence, arson and sabotage—can be said to constitute a revolutionary rising. But already an objective observer ought

to be able to establish a certain sequence of events which tells its own story.

The story which of necessity has to be briefly stated, may be said to start in Wardha on July 14, 1942, when the Congress Working Committee met and passed a resolution demanding complete and immediate transfer of power to an Indian National Government. The resolution made it clear that 'in making the proposal for the withdrawal of British rule from India, the Congress has no desire whatsoever to embarrass Great Britain or the Allied Powers in their prosecution of the war, or in any way to encourage aggression in India. . . . The Congress is, therefore, agreeable to the stationing of the armed forces of the Allies in India in order to ward off and resist Japanese aggression and to protect and help China.' The Committee held that 'all aggression must be resisted, for any submission to it must mean the degradation of the Indian people and the continuation of their subjection. The Congress is anxious to avoid the experiences of Malaya, Singapore and Burma and desires to build up resistance to any aggression or invasion of India. The Congress would change the present ill-will against Britain into goodwill and make India a willing partner in a joint enterprise for securing freedom for the nations and peoples of the world and in the trials and tribulations which accompany it, and this is only possible if India feels the glow of freedom.'

The resolution concluded with the declaration : 'Should, however, this appeal fail, the Congress cannot view without the gravest apprehension the continuation of the state of affairs involving a progressive deterioration in the situation and the weakening of India's will and power to resist aggression. The Congress will then be reluctantly compelled to utilize all the *non-violent* strength it might have gathered since 1920 when it adopted non-violence as part of its policy for the vindication of political rights and liberty. Such a widespread struggle would inevitably be under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.' This resolution was to be ratified by a meeting of the A.I.C.C. in Bombay, on August 7, before it came into operation.

Exactly three days later, on July 17, Sir Frederick Puckle, Secretary to the Government of India, Department of Infor-

mation and Broadcasting, called his stenographer and dictated a confidential circular to be sent to the Chief Secretaries of all Provincial Governments.¹

In a strikingly forthright manner the letter began :

‘ We have three weeks until the meeting of the All-India Congress Committee at Bombay on August the 7th. During this time the matter is mainly a problem of propaganda to mobilize public opinion against the concrete proposals, contained in the Congress Resolution. . . .’

The ‘ main lines of publicity ’ suggested by Sir Frederick included the argument that

‘ a campaign of Civil Disobedience involves recklessly putting the cause of the United Nations in jeopardy and encouraging the Axis . . . it is a direct invitation to Japan.’

‘ It would be advisable *at the present moment*,’ wrote Sir Frederick, ‘ to abstain from attacking the Congress too directly, e.g., by calling it a Fifth Column etc., and certainly to abstain from attacks on individuals ; either may only rally loyal Congressmen in support of a cause in which they may not genuinely believe. *For the moment* the object is to mobilize public opinion against the Congress policy as detrimental to the successful conduct of the war. *Loyalists and waverers may be assured that Government has the means to deal suitably with trouble and intends to use them.* . . . Speeches, letters to the local press, leaflets, cartoons, posters, whispering campaigns are possible media for local publicity. Instructions to All-India Radio stations will be given by the Centre.’

One notes a sinister ring about this letter, bristling as it is with misrepresentations like ‘ a direct invitation to Japan’. ‘ For the moment’, repeatedly used, foretells the wilder and more irresponsible accusations made later against the Congress. And the reference to ‘ loyalists and waverers ’ recalls the atmosphere of Nazi Fifth Column work in the countries of Europe.

The Government was confident that it had ‘ the means to deal suitably with trouble ’ and intended to use them ! What these ‘ means ’ were and how they were used was demonstrated

1. The full text of this circular was made public during the A.I.C.C. meeting in Bombay on August 8, 1942.

soon enough.

The Congress leaders were arrested on the morning of August 9, 1942. In Bombay city the situation, to our personal knowledge, developed along these lines :

The leaders were arrested at dawn. There was a spontaneous hartal. Processions and demonstrations were banned and dispersed by the police with the help of lathis and tear gas. No meetings were allowed. By noon-time demonstrators had been fired upon in several places. In the evening a huge gathering at Shivaji Park, including several thousand women was prevented from holding a meeting (which was to have been addressed by the late Kasturba Gandhi) by repeated lathi charges and tear gas attacks upon the crowd. At sundown one of us saw the first bus smashed and burnt near the Tilak Bridge !

The newspapers were subjected to heavy censorship in those days. Yet a reference to the files indicates a certain significant pattern of events that took place at that time. Disturbances *followed* the news of the leaders' arrest, occurring as the news travelled to the interior ; and they tended to assume a conspiratorial and terroristic aspect *only after* the more peaceful and non-violent forms of demonstration and protest were banned and—often with undue severity—suppressed by the police.

The Government publication, *Congress Responsibility For Disturbances*, in spite of the author's intentions, tends to support this view :

' On August 9 there were disturbances in Bombay, Ahmedabad and Poona but the rest of the country remained quiet. On August 10, disturbances occurred also in Delhi and a few towns in the United Provinces, but still no serious repercussions were reported from elsewhere. It was from August 11 that the situation began to deteriorate rapidly. From then onwards, apart from the *hartals*, protest meetings and similar demonstrations that were to be expected, concerted outbreaks of violence, arson, murder and sabotage took place.'¹

The pros and cons of the sabotage movement may be left

for others to debate and discuss. But certain objective facts ought to be stated to help a correct appraisal of the situation. It is well known that both within and without the Congress there were those who did not subscribe to Gandhiji's doctrine of non-violence and who all along wanted to achieve national freedom by revolutionary methods as demonstrated in France, America, Russia and Ireland. It was the influence of Gandhiji that had kept them immobilized. When he and all his influential lieutenants were taken away, the advocates of violence got an opportunity to come in the open. And, as Gandhiji later wrote to the Viceroy, 'the wholesale arrests of leaders seems to have made people wild with rage to the point of losing self-control.' Gandhiji and the millions of his followers and Congressmen have not strayed from the path of non-violence.

The second point which emerges from a study of events is that though disturbances occurred all over India *including the provinces threatened by invasion*, not a shred of evidence has been produced to suggest that the internal disorders were provoked or aided by any foreign agency, or even that there was any sort of contact between any important section of Congress or nationalist movement *in India* and Japan or any other Axis power, or that the acts of sabotage were intended to help and synchronize with a Japanese attack on India. In his typical manner, Premier Churchill did declare on September 10, 1942, that 'it may well be these activities by the Congress Party have been aided by Japanese fifth-column work', but to this date not a scrap of evidence has been found to substantiate this charge.

Thirdly, it has to be remembered that in the North-West Frontier Province, the only area where the Congress organization was allowed to function and Congress leaders were not immediately arrested, there was not a single case of violence or terrorism !

This background is necessary to highlight a picture of the 'leonine violence' that was inaugurated by Government to suppress the 'Quit India' movement.

The Government pamphlet, already quoted, is significantly silent about the retaliatory measures taken by the Government. We are only blandly told : 'They (the police) had to open fire, no doubt, but in many cases they did so in

sheer self-defence.' *In many cases*, not in all cases ! Does it not mean that there were *other cases* in which the police fired without the justification of self-defence ? Sir Reginald Maxwell admitted in the Assembly that as a result of police firing '340 were killed and about 850 wounded, but the information from parts of Bihar is not yet quite complete. . . .

The military too were forced to open fire on many occasions and the reported figure of casualties thus caused are 318 killed and 153 wounded. Military casualties are 11 killed and 7 wounded.'

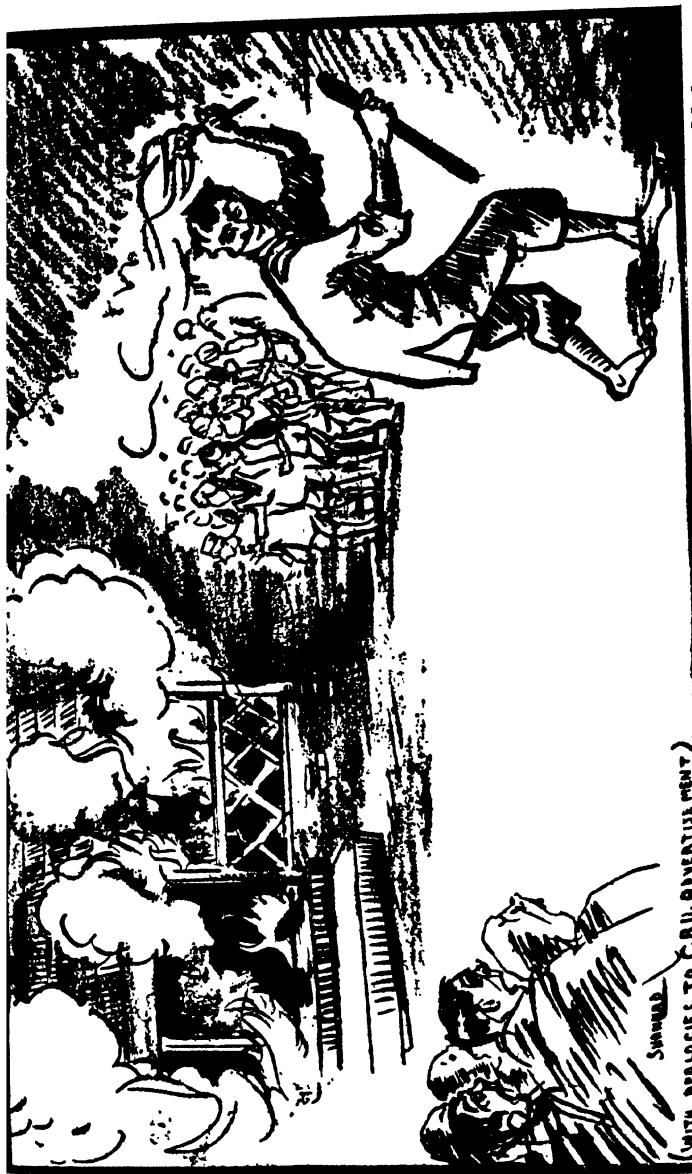
Behind these bare and, undoubtedly, under-estimated statistics lies a story of grim happenings which has not yet been told, due to the complete black-out on such news, but a part of which was told in the Central Assembly by Mr K. C. Neogy when he moved a resolution demanding a Committee to inquire into allegations of police and military excesses, on September 24, 1942. The complete proceedings of this debate are to be found in the *Hindustan Times* publication *India Unreconciled* (pp. 387-422) to which we are indebted for the following :

Moving the resolution, Mr Neogy summed up the charges under six categories, including 'general pillage and arson and wanton damage to property by the police and the military, shooting at random in places not affected by any hooliganism, just for the purpose of creating an impression, random shooting of innocent people, assault or shooting of non-violent crowds or individuals without proper warning', etc.

Giving specific instances, based on evidence from unimpeachable sources, Mr Neogy quoted the testimony of a Member of the Council of State and the district leader of National War Front of Muzaffarpur (Bihar) to the following effect :

'Troops and police were let loose on the countryside. I had reports made to me of the oppression of the police and of the troops, of vandalism, of wanton destruction and loot of private property, of villages burnt, of extortion of money on threat of arrest. . . . What these eyes of mine have seen in the villages : all wealthy shops in the bazaar looted, entire villages burnt not by the mob, but by the soldiers and the police, and I must confess that those sights would haunt me to my dying day.'

He read out a notice served by a zamindar (and Honorary



(WITH APPLAUSES TO C.A.U. ADVENTURISM)

Sir Nazimuddin said in the Bengal Assembly that 195 Congress camps and houses in Midnapore District were burnt by Government forces during the last 5 months of 1942.

Magistrate) of the district of Ghazipur in U.P. on the Government of India, claiming damages for wanton destruction of property. In the course of this he alleged :

‘ . . . four European soldiers accompanied by about 150 military men, armed with rifles and along with the sub-inspector came to my village on the afternoon of 24th August and asked all the male members of my village including my Manager and servants, to leave the village and file on a ‘ kutchra ’ road which passed through the village, on pain of being shot at. . . . In the village the women were asked to come out of their houses on threat of being shot at should they refuse to do so . . . the soldiers deprived them of all their ornaments . . . and after that they raided the houses and looted cash, ornaments, clocks, etc. . . . the soldiers set fire to 20 houses of my tenants in addition to several straw-thatched houses in the village . . . the adult persons were asked to sit like frogs after undressing themselves . . . they had to obey the order at the point of the rifle. . . . ’

Comparatively a minor, but none the less psychologically significant, fact was revealed by Mr Neogy when he read out the following report from the *Bombay Chronicle* :

‘ Most of the Bombay papers have carried the story of residents and passers-by in certain localities being compelled to sweep the streets. Some members of our staff have personally witnessed such incidents, when even ladies were asked to sweep the street at the point of the gun. ’

Shades of Amritsar ! But Bombay was not the only place where innocent citizens were humiliated in this fashion. Similar cases were reported from Bihar.

A day later, in the Council of State, Pandit H. N. Kunzru asked : ‘ Have mobs been machine-gunned from the air, and if so, where ? ’ The Deputy Commander-in-Chief replied ‘ Yes ’ and gave a list of five places.

When this same question was raised in the House of Commons, the statement that ‘ Indian mobs were machine-gunned from aeroplanes, ’ was cheered by Conservative members !

Of these unhappy events, Chimur will long be remembered as the blackest spot of all. It is a village in the Chanda district of the Central Provinces where four Government officials lost

their lives on August 16 as a result of mob fury. Three days later the Deputy Commissioner went there with nearly 300 British and Indian troops which remained in Chimur till the 26th. During these nine days, there was hardly anyone in the village except women and children, all the men having either fled or been arrested. What happened in Chimur at this time was revealed by an investigation carried on by prominent ladies of Nagpur who visited the place a month later. Their report stated that 'cases of rape had occurred along with other forms of frightfulness such as looting and demolition of property on a large scale.' The Government, in lengthy communiques, tried to deny these allegations, basing their entire defence on the fact that the Deputy Commissioner was present in the village during the whole period (except for 27 hours) but no complaint of raping or looting was made to him. It is not difficult to imagine that fear and modesty prevented the women from coming to the officials and lodging complaints concerning their honour. Yet the Deputy Commissioner did admit that on August 21 certain ladies complained to him that some soldiers 'were trying to enter' their houses and that 'steps were taken to prevent the occurrence of any such incident.'¹

Professor Bhansali, a scholarly ascetic and member of Gandhiji's Ashram, was so moved by the Chimur episode that he went to Delhi to request Mr Aney, then a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council, to hold an enquiry into the affair. And when this request was refused, he decided to fast unto death to vindicate the honour of Indian womanhood. His 62-day fast created a sensation in the whole country and made Chimur an all-India issue. The Government was so alarmed that it banned all further publication of any news about Chimur or Professor Bhansali. The daily press in Bombay (except the *Times of India* !) protested against the gagging order by suspending publication on December 18. The All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference resolved to boycott all Government news. As a consequence the Honours List on

1. These facts are collected from the Government's '*Congress Responsibility For Disturbances*' and the *Hindustan Times* publication '*India Unreconciled*'.

New Year Day was blacked-out in the Indian Press. And over a hundred newspapers observed a hartal on January 6.

The self-sacrifice of Professor Bhansali, however, did melt the bureaucratic hearts. On the 63rd day of his fast, just as he was on the verge of collapse, the C.P. Government agreed to remove the ban on the Press as regards Chimur news and the restrictions on visitors to Chimur. Further, Mr Aney agreed to visit Chimur with Professor Bhansali. Thus ended the epic fast in a victory for Satyagraha.

Incidentally the Chimur episode provided one more example of the official attempt to vilify the Congress at all costs, even by deliberate and glaring mis-statements of facts. In a Government communique issued shortly after the unfortunate murder of the four officials it was stated that

‘they were brutally pounded to death with lathis and it is alleged that the assailants offered to save their lives if they forthwith disowned allegiance to the Government and *joined the rioters.*’

Compare this with the statement made by Sir Reginald Maxwell, the Home Member, in the Central Assembly on September 15 :

‘I may mention the tragedy of Chimur in the Central Provinces. Here the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, the Circle Inspector of Police, the Naib Tahsildar, and a constable were offered their lives *if they promised to join the Congress.*’ (Italics ours.)

And thus the year 1942 came to a close. By the end of December,

60,229 persons were in jail,

18,000 were detained under Defence Rules,

940 had been killed by police or military firing, and

1,630 had been injured due to police or military firing.

Six months earlier, on June 6, 1942, Gandhiji had told an American journalist : ‘There are powerful elements of Fascism in British rule, and in India these are the elements which we see and feel every day.’

CHAPTER IV

‘POSTERITY WILL JUDGE’

*‘This is my prayer to Thee My Lord
Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows,
Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend
My knee to insolent might !’¹*

—TAGORE

The shadow of Churchill fell over India’s political landscape. The author of the ‘Naked Fakir’ slander who had once openly declared that ‘Gandhism must be destroyed’ now pursued his aims with almost gleeful cynicism. Along with repression in India—‘what these eyes of mine have seen !’—a regular campaign was started to discredit the Congress, particularly Gandhiji, in the eyes of the world, to isolate it from sympathetic elements in India or abroad, and to silence any voice that might be raised in support of the Congress ideology of freedom.

Speaking in the House of Commons on September 10, 1942, the Prime Minister fired his first shot against the Congress :

‘The Indian Congress Party does not represent all India (Cheers). It does not represent the majority of the people of India (Cheers). It does not even represent the Hindu masses (Cheers). It is a political organization built around a party machine and sustained by certain manufacturing and financial interests (Cheers and laughter). Outside that party and fundamentally opposed to it are 90 million Muslims in British India (Here a member interjected ‘Nonsense’ and there were cries of ‘Order’) who have their right of self-expression, 50 million depressed classes or untouchables, as they are called . . ., and 95 million subjects of the Princes of India with whom we are bound by treaty. In all there are 235 millions in these three large groupings alone out of the

1. This poem by Rabindranath Tagore was recited by Mrs Naidu on the conclusion of Gandhiji’s fast.

390 millions in all India. This takes no account of the large elements among Hindus, Sikhs and Christians in British India who deplore the present policy of the Congress Party.'

It is as hard to beat this speech for its mischievous innuendo as for its strange arithmetic which almost 'proved' that Congress had less than zero per cent support among the Indian people ! It will be particularly remembered, however, for the typically jingo Imperialist note Mr Churchill struck at the very end, and by which he almost gave the whole game away :

'... it has only been necessary to move a few brigades of *British* troops here and there in support of civil power. . . . I may add that large reinforcements have reached India and that the number of *white* soldiers in that country . . . are larger than at any time in the British connexion. I, *therefore*, feel entitled to report to the House that the situation in India at this moment gives no occasion for undue despondency or alarm.' (Italics ours.)

This speech achieved a miracle. Seldom has any pronouncement by a British statesman been received with such unanimous condemnation in India. The reaction of the non-Congress public opinion was as strong as that of the Congressmen. The Liberals denounced it. Even the British-owned *Civil and Military Gazette* of Lahore characterized it as 'fatuous casuistry' and wrote with crushing irony :

'To the 90 million Muslims, the 50 million untouchables and the 95 million States subjects, Mr Churchill might have added 200 millions who are politically unawakened and thus have had the satisfaction of proving that the Congress had a following of minus 45 million—and the utter fatuity of his own outlook on India.'

At least one man lodged his protest in an even more effective manner—and paid the price for it ! Mr Allah Bukhsh, then the Prime Minister of Sind, greeted Mr Churchill's statement by emphatically repudiating 'the vile suggestion that 90 million Muslims of India do not desire immediate independence for their country.' But he did not stop with a statement. He renounced the honours including the title of *Khan Bahadur* that he had received from the Government.

Asked whether the renunciation was the direct result of Mr Churchill's speech, he said : ‘It is the cumulative result of the feeling that the British Government does not want to part with power, but Mr Churchill's speech shattered all hopes.’ A few days later he was called by the Governor and given a message from the Viceroy in reply to his letter renouncing his honours. Then he—the legally elected Prime Minister of a provincial government—was summarily dismissed with no more ceremony than the rustication of a school-boy by an irate headmaster !

A month later, another important non-Congress personage, Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee, the Finance Minister of Bengal, resigned his office as a protest against the Government of India's policy with regard to the political situation and the Bengal Governor's constant interference with the work of his Ministers. His letter of resignation is a political document of the first importance and a crushing indictment of the policy of repression which, in certain parts of Bengal, he said, ‘resembles the activities of Germans in occupied countries.’

Meanwhile the campaign of misrepresenting the Congress was being carried on abroad with remarkable assiduity and amazing disregard for truth or even consistency. Six months after the failure of his Mission, Sir Stafford Cripps came out with a brand new theory. Referring to the breakdown of his negotiations, he said in the Commons : ‘The change which occurred took place on the intervention of Mr Gandhi. The Congress Working Committee had passed a resolution accepting the proposals. Mr Gandhi intervened and subsequently the resolution was reversed.’ The statement was promptly contradicted by Mr Rajagopalachariar and, indeed, no one took this crude after-thought seriously. But it highlighted the fact that an attempt was being made by British statesmen and propagandists to present Gandhiji to the world in the role of the ‘villain of the piece’. The campaign was particularly strong in America, where the natural sympathy for India's aspirations was sought to be confused and vitiated by representing Congress and Gandhiji as potential allies of Japan. Pearl Buck, the distinguished authoress, in a message to a meeting, referred to the British efforts to paint Gandhiji as an appeaser of Japan and condemned them as ‘false pro-

paganda'. Indeed, it was becoming apparent that, British propaganda notwithstanding, the American people were beginning to take growing interest in the Indian situation and that at least some of them realized its close relation to the larger issues of the future of a democratic world. Wendell Willkie had just then returned from his round-the-world trip. President Roosevelt had expressly asked him *not to go to India* and yet Willkie returned to report :

'Many of them asked the question that has become almost a symbol in Asia : What about India ? Now I did not go to India and I do not propose to discuss that tangled question, but it has one aspect in the East that I should report. From Cairo onwards it confronted me at every turn. The wisest man in China told me : "When the aspirations of India for freedom were put aside to some future date it was not Britain that suffered in the public esteem in the Far East, it was the United States." This wisest man was not quarrelling with the British, it was just with British imperialism in India. He does not happen to believe in it, but he was telling me that by our silence on India we have already drawn heavily on our reservoir of goodwill in the East.'

On September 30, 1942, Raymond Clapper, noted American columnist, had written : 'War in the East is being placed in serious jeopardy by the conditions in India. . . .' Robert Norton, Secretary of the American Round Table on India, wrote on December 1 : 'The Indian deadlock must be broken to prepare an offensive *via* Burma. . . . The greatest need of the United Nations for preparing the Burma offensive is a conciliatory solution of the Indian deadlock which will bring about the full participation of the Indian people in the war alongside of the Allies.' A member of the House of Representatives said the Allies could not win 'if the people fear that we fight only to preserve and restore the British Empire,' and added, 'India is as much our problem as it is England's.' A few days later Washington announced the appointment of Mr William Phillips as Envoy to India¹ and the *New York*

1. During his stay in India Mr Phillips sought permission from the Government of India to interview Gandhiji and was refused !

World Telegram commented : ‘ Officially Anglo-Indian relations are none of our business but with over a million dough-boys overseas, many within or on the fringes of the British Empire, we cannot help being interested in what is going on.’ And Lin Yutang, that great and noble-hearted Chinese, told the world : ‘ I warn that India will not give up the fight for liberty until she gets it.’

The frail little man, imprisoned in the Aga Khan’s bungalow in Poona and cut off from all contact with the outside world, had verily shaken the continents. But he could not move the Colossus of New Delhi—Lord Linlithgow, Governor-General and Viceroy of India !

Repeated attempts by Mr Rajagopalachariar and others, anxious for a political settlement, to meet Gandhiji were frustrated by the refusal of the Viceroy to allow any interviews. Indeed, for over six months the Government succeeded in imposing a black-out on the Mahatma. Books containing some of his writings were banned. It was regarded an offence to print even his pictures. Any oral or pictorial mention of him in films was immediately cut out or defaced by the censors. And no news of what went on inside the Aga Khan’s bungalow was allowed to leak out.

On February 11, 1943, therefore, millions of Indians were shocked to find their beloved leader once again making front-page news by an act of dangerous self-sacrifice. At the age of 73, he was going to undertake a 21-day fast to vindicate his honour. It seemed that, unknown to his countrymen, a prolonged correspondence had been going on between Gandhiji and the Viceroy which was now published in full. The following points emerged significantly from the historic letters published :

1. Gandhiji had written to the Viceroy as early as August 14, five days after his arrest, in which he said that ‘ the Government of India were wrong in precipitating the crisis ’ and that he had ‘ fully contemplated ’ sending a letter to the Viceroy ‘ before taking concrete action ’.

2. In the course of the correspondence which went on for six months Gandhiji clearly and repeatedly re-affirmed that ‘ the Congress policy still remains unequivocally non-violent.’

3. However, he refused to condemn the acts of violence

without at the same time condemning the Government's 'leonine violence' which had 'goaded the people to the point of madness'.

4. He reiterated his opposition to 'Fascism in every shape or form' and maintained that 'the Congress was making every effort to identify India with the Allied cause'.

5. Holding that his patience was being exhausted and that as a *Satyagrahi* he had only one remedy—i.e. 'to crucify the flesh by fasting', Gandhiji finally informed the Viceroy : 'You have left me no loopholes for escaping the ordeal I have set before myself. . . . If I do not survive the ordeal, I shall go to the Highest Judgment Seat with the fullest faith in my innocence. Posterity will judge between you as a representative of an all-powerful Government and me as a humble man who has tried to serve his country and humanity through it.'

6. Gandhiji rejected the offer of temporary release for the period of fasting.

The publication of this correspondence and of Gandhiji's resolve to fast produced certain far-reaching results. It gave a lie to the official slanders about Congress being pro-Fascist and having organized the sabotage movement. Indeed, it is significant that the publication of Gandhiji's letters containing as they did the reiteration of his unequivocal faith in non-violence immediately put a stop to the outbreaks of violence that had been sporadically occurring in different parts of the country. At one stroke the people were shaken out of their mood of inertia and frustration, and the issue of Indian freedom was once again challengingly posed before the world. Lionel Fielden, ex-Controller of Broadcasting, warned Britain : 'If Mr Gandhi should die, hatred engendered in India will be a grave and lasting consequence.'

The fast began. The twenty-one days, as strength steadily ebbed out of the frail body and the tone of the doctors' bulletins from Poona became more and more anxious, were days of personal anguish for every Indian man, woman and child. But they were also days of intense activity on the political plane. The Central Assembly demanded Gandhiji's release through an adjournment motion and, a few days later, condemned the Government's policy in not releasing him through another adjournment. The Communist Party demand-

ed his release and so did the Trade Union Congress. The All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference demanded the release. The All Party Leaders Conference attended by ' 300 public men from different parts of India, representing various communities, creeds, and interests—commerce and industry, landed gentry, workers, Communists, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Parsis and British missionaries ' including such eminent persons as Mr Rajagopalachariar, Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru, Dr M. R. Jayakar, Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee, Mr Allah Bukhsh and others, demanded immediate release in the strongest possible terms, in view of the very alarming news from Poona. The Conference sent the resolution to the Viceroy and, by cable, to Mr Churchill. Hundreds of letters and telegrams demanding, urging, requesting, pleading for release poured into the Viceregal palace. But the imperial heart of Britain was unmoved, even as the most precious life in India hung by a slender thread.

And yet the imperial edifice was shaken to its foundations. Three members of the Viceroy's Executive Council—Sir Homi Mody, Supply Member, Mr N. R. Sarkar, Member for Commerce and Food, and Mr M. S. Aney, Member for Indians Overseas—resigned on the specific issue of Gandhiji's release. Nor was that all. A meeting of the Imperial Secretariat Staff in New Delhi—the very men who keep the bureaucratic machine running—passed a resolution demanding Gandhiji's release ' immediately and unconditionally '. Even the clerks of General Headquarters of the Army sent a telegram to the Viceroy in similar terms.

America, Britain, China, the whole world watched with anxious interest the news from Poona. Crack war correspondents were rushed from battle fronts in the Middle East to ' cover ' the strangest assignment of their careers—a battle for truth and justice carried on within the frail body of an old man ! Friends of India, Radicals, Democrats, Communists, Socialists, Liberals, lovers of freedom all over the world were stirred by the event and the issue of Indian independence once again shook the earth.

The ordeal was over at last and a sigh of thanksgiving went up in the sky. A life was saved. But more than that a principle, a nation's honour, was vindicated !



‘The Government of India have no intention of allowing the fast to deflect their policy.’—*Communique* [February 1943]

There were those who asked what the fast had achieved. The American Press gave the answer. The *Nation* spoke up : 'Mahatma Gandhi's survival dramatizes like nothing else the continued bitterness of the Indian nationalists and would be used by a wise Government for reopening negotiations.'

Wrote *Time* newsmagazine : 'To the Indian people a great tragedy has been averted and to their minds the fast has, firstly, revived India as United Nations' problem affecting the entire political future in the East ; secondly, it has again enshrined Gandhi as a saint ; and thirdly, brought rival political and religious groups together.'

The world, marvelling at the miracle of survival, waited for the British Government to come out with a gesture of conciliation. But no such gesture was forthcoming. And when the fast was over, and the doctors, relations and visitors had departed, the gates closed again with a clang of finality. Within the Aga Khan's bungalow, the frail little man, exhausted by his self-imposed ordeal, summoned his indomitable spirit to keep him company and to sustain him for future combats with evil and injustice.

CHAPTER V

BENGAL'S DANCE OF DEATH

'Ah, very soon
The very moon
That rises overhead
May turn a corpse and wear a shroud
Of some poor dirty ragged cloud,
And we have no more room on earth to bury all our dead.'

—HARINDRANATH CHATTOPADHYAYA (*Blood of Stones*)
'Famine approximates more and more towards becoming a representation of the normal condition of many parts of India. . . . India's millions were starving because of England's neglect of duty to India.'

—WILLIAM DIGBY (*Prosperous India*, published in 1901)
As India approached the first anniversary of Gandhiji's arrest, the country was shocked to learn that hundreds of

people—men and women and children—were dying on the streets and pavements of Calcutta. Dying of starvation !

The bare news-reports were followed by more detailed and grimly vivid accounts of the calamity that had overtaken that unhappy province. All over the countryside, it seemed, the peasants—the tillers of the soil, the growers of grain !—had nothing to eat. Prices of rice, Bengal's staple diet, were mounting rapidly—from Rs. 4 per maund in December 1941 to Rs. 35 per maund in August 1943 !—and people were selling their utensils, their homes, their land, their children and their wives to be able to buy a few seers of paddy.

From month to month, from week to week, the price of rice soared higher and the misery of the people grew grimmer. In September-October the black-market price in Calcutta was Rs. 40 and in the mofussil anything from Rs. 50 to Rs. 100 per maund. Unable to get anything to eat in their villages, the hungry peasants smashed centuries-old tradition of conservatism, of being rooted in the soil, and started walking towards Calcutta in the hope of getting some gruel at a relief kitchen.

In this present war there have been many a historic mass migration. The Chinese wrote a glorious epic in their history when they marched *en masse* from the coastal cities to the interior. They were retreating before the onslaught of the enemy but their hearts were full of hope and defiant courage. They would show the Japs ! They would 'dig in' in the spacious plains and ragged hills of China ; they would build a new Great Wall of human flesh and bones to stop the fascist tide ; they would turn guerillas and harass the enemy, avenge the black deeds of horror that had been perpetrated upon them. They were resolved upon their patriotic purpose, they had faith in their leaders. They were hungry and homeless and foot-sore but they sang as they marched, for they were marching towards hope.

The Soviets, in those dark early days of the Nazi invasion, set fire to their homes and their factories, their crops and stores of grains, they even blew up their beloved Dnieper Dam, that was a monument to their collective genius of construction. And they marched back when forced to retreat, taking refuge in the forests and hills of the interior. But there was fierce vengeance in their hearts, a burning hatred for

the enemy, a grim resolve in their minds to rid their country of the fascist menace.

But the hunger marchers of Bengal had nothing to sustain them as they trekked weary miles on the long, long road to Calcutta—neither faith nor courage, neither hope nor purpose, not even anger or resentment. Here were self-respecting old peasants, honest and hard workers, forced to seek charity ; here were young men whose manhood had been sapped by destitution, young women whose beauty had been ravaged by hunger. All grace, all humanity, all innate consciousness of moral values had disappeared from their shrivelled bodies ; their very souls had been corroded by the constant gnawing of the stomach. They walked without hope, listlessly dragging their emaciated bodies, a phantom caravan in the Sahara of Death.

They came to Calcutta in endless swarms and they lay themselves down to die on the side-walks and the pavements. They were too weak to march in procession to demand redress like the hunger-marchers of Wales and England, they were too weak even to ask aloud for alms. Many of them could only beg with their eyes, eyes that held so much helpless animal pleading, such naked horror of death ! They lay there and they died—in front of restaurants and cafés, in front of mansions of the rich, close enough to smell the food being prepared within. Some of them died in front of food shops, near enough to see the delicacies displayed, near enough to extend their dying hands and pick up a *rassagoola*, a loaf of bread, or a plate of rice—if only they could ! But they couldn't. And so they died.

In the wake of starvation came Disease and, even after the gruel kitchens had been started, thousands died of cholera and dysentery and malaria. Calcutta's death rate rose from 550 to 2,000 per week. The weekly death-rate throughout Bengal reached 50,000. By December millions had died—far more than the total Allied casualties (except Russian) in this global war !

But these were only the dead. There were others, the living dead, who would for ever carry on their bodies and in their souls the brand of this fearful period—stunted, starved children who would never grow to normal manhood, girls who

would never know the fulfilment of motherhood, for they had sold their honour to get a morsel of food and had got venereal infection in return for it !

It was the maddening, excruciating dance of death. Millions all over the country were moved by it not only to bitterness and anger but also to humanity and compassion. The hunger-marchers had died on the pavements but their very death roused the nation. Purse-strings were loosened everywhere and relief flowed to Bengal. A terrible cry of indignation rose in India and abroad and the shocked public opinion forced the Government to take some measures to alleviate the situation. But the dance of death in Bengal is not yet over. Even after a year, the shadow of starvation lies over that fair but unfortunate land, and Death lies in wait, crouching for another leap to action.

And as he saw this grimly tragic cavalcade of horrors passing, as it were, his prison-window, there was one man who saw in it the melancholy vindication of his own forebodings. If he were not so grieved by the spectacle, he might have cried : ' I told you so, I told you so ! ' For, a year and a half earlier, Gandhiji had written, in *Harijan* on January 25, 1942 :—

' The greatest need of the immediate present is to feed the hungry and clothe the naked. There is already scarcity in the land both of food and clothing. As the war progresses both the scarcities must increase. There are no imports from outside, either of foodstuff or of cloth. The well-to-do may not feel the pinch as yet or at all, but the poor are feeling it now. . . . '

What was the genesis of this famine in Bengal ? There are two different views : one lays most of the blame on the Government's Denial Policy and other war-time acts, the other on the hoarders. There is truth in both these theories, so far as the immediate causes are concerned, but the ultimate truth lies not only somewhere between them but beyond them. To look into the immediate conditions that caused the scarcity and to ignore the historical background is to be guilty not only of over-simplification but of criminal abetment of the evasion of final responsibility.

For nearly two centuries now the economic life of India has

been dictated by Britain, in the interests of Britain. It was stated in the Hot Springs Conference that 'one third of the Indian people are habitually under-fed in normal times.' (No wonder the expectation of life of the average Indian is 27 years as against 62 for an Englishman !) Financially the Government of India is subservient to the Bank of England and the Rupee is tagged on to the Pound, to the detriment of the Rupee. Industrialization has been discouraged and agriculture allowed to be carried on according to ancient uneconomic methods.

In Bengal, to the economics of subjection have been added the hardships of an inequitable and uneconomic system of land tenure which itself was imposed to create a class of landlords traditionally loyal to the new rulers of the country. The pressure on land has been increasing, for industrialization is slow and agricultural methods have not been improved. Rural indebtedness is at a high level and the standard of living has been steadily going down. Ten years ago the Director of Public Health in Bengal stated that the peasants of that province were taking a diet 'on which even rats could not live'. In 1943 they were not getting even that !

It will be seen thus that the long-suffering camel—the Bengal peasantry—was already overburdened. One straw more could have broken its back. It got more than one and utterly collapsed gasping for sheer life !

Bengal is a deficit province—before the war it used to import about 10% of its requirements. The fall of Burma cut off considerable rice supplies. And yet rice from Bengal was actually exported to the countries of the Middle and Near East. Big stocks were built up within India for military needs and the Central Government's agents went about buying all the grain they could. Apart from the army, large industrial concerns—particularly the European ones—built their own reserves of grain.

With the enemy at India's door-step and the economic life of the country threatened, the Government did nothing to safeguard the people's food. On the contrary, in a panicky way, they inaugurated a reckless and foolish 'Denial Policy' (which has been called 'economic scorched earth') by which the peasants were deprived of their boats, barges and

carts, thus upsetting agricultural transport. The Governor, in the face of opposition from his own Ministers, ordered that all surplus stocks should be purchased from main rice-growing districts bordering on the sea and immediately removed to safer areas further north and west. It was a glaring example of preparing for total war in the bureaucratic, bungling manner *without the willing support of the people*. Attempts have been made by Mr Amery and others to blame the provincial Ministers but, apart from their own shortcomings, they were really helpless as the entire Food Policy was dictated by New Delhi and carried out by the Governor through his officials—over the heads of the Ministers ! Thus they experimented first with price-control without adequate stocks, then with free trade in the neighbouring provinces of Orissa, Bihar and Assam, adopted half-hearted schemes of rationing and generally made confusion worse confounded. When appeals were made to the Central Government to come to the rescue of Bengal by rushing supplies they fell on deaf ears and Mr Amery continued to state in the Commons that the major reason for food scarcity in Bengal and elsewhere in India was ‘the fact that Indians were eating more per head as a result of increased incomes’. On July 14, speaking in the Bengal Assembly on the food situation, Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee said :

‘How will this war be won ? If Bengal is famished, if Bengal is ruined, can the war be won ? Will peace and morale ever remain intact ? . . . We have got to get from the Government of India and the British Government supplies, immediate supplies, of foodstuffs for the people of Bengal. (A voice from the European Group : “Why don’t you go to Tojo, who is your pal ?”) . . . That is the way in which we are to expect a reply from the European Group.’

No supplies came—until five months later when Lord Wavell assumed charge and ordered the release of big quantities of rice from the Army stocks !

None can deny that there was scarcity of rice in Bengal, that it had been caused by the Government’s negligence and folly (‘Mistakes and miscalculations have been made, but never deliberately,’ said Sir Azizul Haque, the Food Member,

**"MISTAKES AND MISCALCULATIONS
HAVE BEEN MADE, BUT NEVER**

DELIBERATELY"

— AZIZUL HAQUE



[November 1943]

in November 1943), and even what little could be done to avert the crisis was left undone by the authorities including both the Fazlul Huq and the Nazimuddin Ministries. And yet while rice was scarce, there was *some* rice available in the province. Who held this rice ?

In his article already quoted Gandhiji presumably had foreseen the situation when he wrote :

‘ Grain-dealers have to shed their greed and the habit of making as much profit as possible. They must be satisfied with as little as possible. They run the risk of being looted, if they do not gain the credit of being keepers of grain for the sake of the poor. They should be in touch with the people in their neighbourhood. Congressmen have to visit grain-dealers within their beat and give them the message of the time.’

The grain-dealers of Bengal certainly did little to show that they had shed their greed. At no time anywhere in the worst famine area was rice *completely unavailable*. It was available; in limited quantities—at a price ! A price that was sometimes ten times (or even more) of the 1941 market rates, a price that the poor peasant was completely unable to pay, a price that middle-class people could just afford by spending all their incomes only on food ! In accordance with laissez-faire economics of capitalism, it is the law of supply and demand that determines the price of a commodity and it is no use blaming anyone for hoarding and profiteering. Against this, one has only to state that (1) it is such economics that has provoked bloody revolutions in world history, and (2) that you cannot save a man dying of starvation by whispering the words ‘laissez-faire’ in his ears.

It is remarkable that in a province that was in the throes of the worst famine in recent history and where price of rice had soared to even 100 rupees per maund, no serious action was taken against the hoarders. In the absence of Congress in jail, the Communists were the only group who carried on a loud anti-hoarder campaign. But neither the Government officials nor the Muslim League Ministry nor the Hindu Mahasabha opposition sought to have the stocks unearthed and the hoarders exposed and punished. What could be the reason for this anti-social apathy ?

The hoarder or the profiteer, we must remember, is not a black-faced, fierce-countenanced furtive villain, hiding from justice. As often as not (and recent actions taken against profiteers in cloth in Bombay have proved it) he is a rich, influential and 'respectable' member of society, a member of clubs, a donor to charities and the war funds, a friend of politically powerful personages. The only thing that distinguishes him from other capitalists is that he does not mind taking a few risks by indulging in extra-legal and anti-social activities to make his millions. Perhaps it is not merely the money but the speculative thrill of the game that appeals to him. He is the financial gambler—he buys cheap in the hope of selling high—and he knows the dice is loaded in his favour when the commodity he deals in is as indispensable as food. And even if he realizes that this economic process would starve the people who cannot afford to pay his price, he can always salvage his conscience by donating a few thousands to the relief of these very victims of his cupidity !

The only plausible reason why no action was taken against hoarders in Bengal is that politics in that province had been reduced to a most unfortunate factionalism. Every party was busy denouncing the other. The Hindu Mahasabha condemned the Ministry and the Ispahanis (who represented Muslim capitalists in the grain business) and appealed to the Viceroy to promulgate section 93 and thus remove even the vestiges of democracy from the provincial administration. The Muslim League condemned the Hindu hoarders but failed to expose the Muslim hoarders. And the powerful European elements in the speculative grain business enjoyed the protection of the Central Government and the Governor. The extremists among nationalists, anxious to put all the blame exclusively on the Government, blinded their eyes to the reality of hoarding—not realizing that the Government, by its bungling, had created the hoarders and was now protecting them by its inaction.

Bengal's Dance of Death is not over yet. According to the latest reports more people are dying from epidemics than in the worst days of scarcity ; thirty millions out of Bengal's total population of sixty millions are stricken with malaria. The long-range effects of famine still persist and will persist



All incognito ! (Wavell pays an incognito visit to distressed Bengal.)

[December 1943]

for many years to come. The rural economy has almost completely broken down. A large section of the peasantry is either dead, marooned in the cities in a state of destitution, or is physically exhausted due to depleted vitality and the ravages of malaria. Consequently there is an appalling dearth of labour. The last *aman* crop could not be harvested in some areas and the *rabi* crop could not be sown extensively. The few boats and carts that had survived the 'Denial Policy' have since been sold off to buy a few handfuls of rice. Thousands of peasants have already sold their land to the money-lenders. Hunger had also forced the artisans to sell off or mortgage their tools and implements. Today weavers are without their looms and too poor to buy the yarn to resume their work. The fishermen, the blacksmiths, the potters—they are all sitting idle, without money, without food, without work, without hope !

Thanks to the fundamental fallacies of the economics of imperialism, the whole structure of Bengal's society is falling to pieces. Homes are broken, families scattered, people's innate social and moral values uprooted. It is a harrowing spectacle, one of the blackest epochs in the history of Indo-British relations. But it is also a grim monument to the capitalistic greed of the hoarders and the suicidal factionalism of politicians who could not unite even to fight Death !

CHAPTER VI

WITHIN THE BORDER

'No nation excepting Japan can carry on a sacred war. His Majesty considers the entire world as His Majesty's dwelling. His Majesty is the Emperor of the world. Therefore if the ways of the Emperor are understood fully by the people in the world, there should not be any objection to having our Emperor as the world's ruler.'

—A TOKYO BROADCAST

The war against Japan forms a part of the present global conflict. It is, however, more or less an accidental coincidence,

for Japan's career of aggression can be traced much earlier than that of her Axis colleagues in Europe. The war in the east did not begin with the war in the west, nor will it end with it. Until December 7, 1941, the world Armageddon was to us like the sound of distant drums. But the blast effects of the bombs that fell that fateful day on Pearl Harbour and Singapore were felt as far away as Bombay, Calcutta and Delhi—even New Delhi !

The war came to India not with a bang but a whimper. Long before the first bombs had fallen on Indian soil, even before the enemy had reached the frontiers of India, a wave of blind panic swept over the country. A mass exodus began from the principal cities. An emasculated people who had lived for generations in the hot-house of pax Britannica can, however, be excused this temporary loss of nerve, considering that similar scenes have been witnessed in every country of the world under the first impact of war. Our countrymen soon proved that they could also take it, and this too, when they were denied the guidance of their leaders. They have maintained their morale in spite of external danger and internal discontent, in spite of the blandishments of the co-prosperity salesmen and the propaganda pin-pricks of our own National War Front ! They have stuck to their homes and jobs in spite of the bombs showered upon their heads by their self-declared friends—the gentlemen of Japan.

Indeed we seem to have gone from one extreme to another. The gooseflesh of May 1942 has given place to the phlegm of May 1944. Our arm-chair strategists pay more attention to the second front in Europe than to the first front in India. The Jap is no longer a scare in the bazaar, not even a joke at the club. Except in the districts directly affected by the hostilities, Indians as a whole generally ignore the fact that their motherland has been invaded for the first time in modern history, that the enemy is right within the border. Their morale is not of the active type which makes them gird up their loins and cry, like the men and women of Russia, *Death to the invader !* It is not even of the serene, stoical nature typified in Arnold's famous lines :

‘ The East bowed low before the blast
In patient, deep disdain—

She let the legions thunder past
And plunged in thought again !'

It is rather a morale sired by resentment out of frustration. The psychology underlying it is something like this :

'The war is not of India's making. She was declared a belligerent even without so much as "by your leave". Our rulers are professedly waging this war—with the help of our men, money and material—for freedom and democracy. But when we demanded that same democracy and freedom so as to enable us to mobilize our full resources and man-power for fighting the Fascists, we were offered, firstly by Lord Linlithgow—a Consultative Assembly ; secondly by Amery—the August Declaration ; and thirdly and finally by the entire British Cabinet—the Cripps Proposals ! We asked for bread and got—not one, but three stones in succession !

'And because our national leaders protested against this mockery of war aims, they were put behind prison bars. The Government of India have created a desert in India and call it peace. In her new *Avatar*, pax Britannica is known as the Defence of India Rules ! Politically we are supposed to be in cold storage ; mentally we live in a furnace !'

The result of all this is a sullen yet strong apathy which embraces the Japs as much as the British. 'Let them fight and decide the issue between themselves. It is all the same to us ! After all we can't be much worse than what we are !'

This would, we think, be a fair statement of the psychological approach of the Indian people at large to the present situation. It would be absurd to call this a defeatist outlook, and wicked to condemn it as Fifth Columnist. And it is an outrageous lie to say that the Indian National Congress has been nursing such mentality. Its record as an uncompromising enemy of Fascism since long before the war began is there for all the world to see. If it asked for freedom, it was not to vote itself out of the war but to enable it voluntarily to shoulder its due burden in the crusade of free men against the forces of Fascism. This was before the Japs attacked the Allies. But even at the time when Britain was looking upon Japan as the policeman of the East and America shipping

to her scrap iron and oil (to be used for bombing Chinese civilians !) India had not any love lost for Japan. Apart from the ideological opposition to her grotesque race theories and to the grafting of Fascism on the indigenous feudalism, India knew too well Japan's black record in Korea and China to have any illusions about her friendship for India. Tagore's letters to Yone Noguchi do not merely give expression to India's condemnation of Japan's role in Asia ; they form a classic in the anti-Fascist literature of the world.

The myth is, however, being sedulously spread since that fateful August day that the Congress leaders got cold feet no sooner the Japanese flood-tide of conquest threatened to engulf India, that they, and particularly Mahatma Gandhi, began to think in terms of appeasing Japan, and that they somehow wanted to keep India out of the war. Government spokesmen came out in February 1943 with a notorious pamphlet called *Congress Responsibility for the Disturbances, 1942-43*, whose sole aim was to give the Congress dog a bad name *after* it was hanged ! The entire propaganda machinery of the Government of India was in labour for six long months to collect this evidence—on the strength of which no sane judge will convict even a cockroach ! It condemned the Congress as 'a clique which it has already been shown to be thoroughly defeatist in outlook, and whose leader had already expressed the intention of negotiating with Japan.'

Now 'Quit India' was the counsel neither of rank cowardice nor of scheming treachery to the Allied cause. Mahatma Gandhi was not a potential Petain whom it was necessary to keep out of harm's way. On the contrary, he wanted to galvanize the entire country for defending itself against the Jap invader in his own non-violent way. 'Remember,' he wrote that time, 'I am more interested than the British in keeping the Japanese out. For Britain's defeat in Indian waters may mean only the loss of India, but if Japan wins, India loses everything.' Again, 'If I am impatient of the British yoke, I am so because India's sullenness and suppressed delight of the man in the street over British reverses are dangerous symptoms which may lead to the success of Japanese designs upon India, if they are not dealt with in the proper manner ; whereas India finding herself in possession of com-

plete freedom will never want the Japanese to enter India. India's sullenness and discontent will be changed as if by magic into joyful and hearty co-operation with the Allies in consolidating and preserving her liberty from any and every evil design.'

The authors of '*Congress Responsibility*' have not included these words in the farrago of quotations they have given from Gandhiji's writings. For they do not reveal a defeatist, much less a traitor, but a man throbbing with the fighting spirit. No doubt fighting in the Gandhian sense means fighting non-violently and one may quarrel—as Nehru and Azad did—with that weapon as being of little utility against a bloodthirsty and sadistic foe. But you cannot question Gandhiji's transparent sincerity, his burning desire to defend his country or his transcendental courage.

Again, much play is made with that word 'defeatism'. What was the defeatism which Congress leaders displayed in these months? Did they throw up their hands like the men of Vichy and cry plaintively that the war was over? Or did they merely doubt the British ability to protect the country then? Such a doubt frequently expressed in these cataclysmic days may have hurt—it did—the British *amour-propre*. Malaya, Java, Burma—would it be India? Would the British who were retreating for six long months be able to make a stand on India's frontiers at last? To every student of strategy it seemed a debatable if not doubtful proposition. This was not defeatism but a sense of realism which was vitally essential if India was to be saved. Many of those, for example, who have been praising the Red Army for the last two years were in the beginning frankly sceptical of its ability to stand up to the Germans. Even the British and the United States General Staffs are said to have given the Soviets from 6 to 10 weeks before the final collapse!!

The Red Army was a colossus cloaked in mystery. There was, however, no mystery about the British forces which had retreated all the way from Singapore—those, that is, who did not surrender there, including 70,000 Indian soldiers! As General Stilwell said, they had got a hell of a lot of beating and whatever tribute is due to the individual soldier, as an army the Allied forces had come out very badly indeed in the

middle of 1942. The Jap army had proved itself superior in every way—in strategy and leadership, in training and equipment. The speed with which it conquered territory after territory and spread itself over a perimeter of 8,000 miles within eight months has no parallel in military annals.

We in India were, therefore, fully justified in doubting Britain's ability to defend our country in 1942. The loss of India may have been looked upon as merely another strategic retreat by the Allies ; to Indians, however, it would have been virtual death ! We had every right to defend our own motherland—hadn't we ?—in our own way. What the professional British army (which is always scrupulously segregated from the current of national life—for obvious reasons !) so miserably failed to do, a people's army would achieve. After all China also had no guns and tanks and aeroplanes. She had been fighting the Japs with her bare hands for five long years and so could we. So we would fight too ! A People's War. Total War. Freedom—to fight for freedom !

That was the refrain of the Congress leaders. If this was defeatism, it was preferable to the British over-confidence, complacency and incompetence, which had revealed itself so woefully in Malaya and Burma. Fortuitously it so happened that the Japs did stop just on the borders of India. The credit for that, however, goes more to General Monsoon than to General Wavell. Apart from that the Jap lines of communications were already overstretched. In modern war, logistics is a more important factor than the will to conquer. Besides the Nipponese python had to digest the huge meal he had swallowed. He had to consolidate his new-won Empire which spread over an area of 4,000,000 square miles and comprised 300 million people ! Logistics, geography and Jap digestion played a more important part in saving India than anything else in 1942.

The very fact that the Jap could not only infiltrate into India in March 1944 but push out the Allied force from the Manipur Road and capture Kohima is extremely significant in this connexion. The British have had two long and undisturbed years to marshall their resources in India. The Yankees, too, have been with us these two years and have taken over the railway lines behind the Assam front under the Stars and

Stripes ! A Chinese force has been training in India. Recently even West Africans have been brought over to fight for us. The entire civil administration in the country is subordinated to the military needs. The Indian Army—a voluntary army, it is rubbed in again and again !—has passed the two-million mark. Our navy and air force have multiplied themselves so many times : it is of course easy to do that when you start from scratch ! A brand-new Command altogether—the South-East Asia Command—has been established under Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten to wage the war in the East. A Field-Marshal has been installed in the gadi of the Grand Moghul in New Delhi. An Australian has been appointed the Governor of Bengal—the base of the 14th Army.

And yet one dark night in March 1944—mark the year—the Jap ambles along into India and pushes out the Allied forces from what was intended to be their spring-board to Burma. Token Invasion !—said General Auchinleck breaking the news to the soporific Council of State !

Token of what ?—Token of all that has happened during the last 21 months ; token of India's national frustration ; token of the Allied strategy which punches Hitler and hopes to see Tojo's nose bleed ! During the past 21 months the Congress has been outlawed and black-guarded in the eyes of the world. Not only the professional propagandists but even brass-hats took a hand in the vilification of the Congress. Here is a typical extract from the broadcast delivered to the Army by a high-placed military officer—a Lt.-General—in September 1942 :

'To save India is part of our duty and you and I cannot help feeling a sense of disappointment, even of frustration, at the ingratitude of a section of people whose country we have come so far to save from a grasping and ruthless foe !'

It is significant that Tokyo, too, has followed the same propaganda line—saving India for India ! Japan, it is frequently stated by Jap propagandists, is in sympathy with India's aspirations for freedom. She has love and regard for the Indians. She is extremely sorry that Britain is exploiting her. 'Your *Netaji* Subhas Chandra Bose, is himself leading the army of liberation. You ought therefore to trust us and

help us to drive the British out of your soil—to save India for India !’

Even in its present mood of apathy, the Indian people know instinctively that India can be saved for India only by Indians themselves. They are apathetic but not defeatist. They refuse to be provoked by threats or wooed by blandishments. Their morale is intact, though in a passive manner. It can be made active only by leaders like Gandhiji and Nehru. The Communists are no doubt trying their level best to create a psychology of national defence but their success is necessarily limited. It is only the Congress which can rouse the masses and galvanize them into action. Every Congress leader who has come out of jail has given the call for national resistance to the enemy within the border.

India has to be saved for herself. She has to be saved also for her good and great neighbour, China. In the global strategy of war, India has a key role to play. She is the main Allied base in south-east Asia. She is the chief reservoir of man-power. She is the principal arsenal. She is the spring-board for the reconquest of Burma through which in its turn runs the life-line of China. And it is only from China that the final offensive can be launched upon Japan. The security, and not only the security but also the contentment and co-operation of India is thus essential for China. She knows that only a free India can give her help in full measure. And on her part, India realizes that a free China is the pivot of peace and civilization in the East. She is anxious to do whatever lies in her power to succour China. The shadow of the same enemy lies over both and each is necessary for the redemption of the other. ‘A Japanese domination of either India or China’, wrote Gandhiji to Marshal Chiang Kai-Shek on the eve of his arrest, ‘would be equally injurious to the other country and to world peace. The domination must therefore be prevented and I should like India to play her natural and rightful role in this. I feel that India cannot do this while she is in bondage.’

CHAPTER VII

THE HOUSE THAT JINNAH BUILT

'Divide and Rule.'

—ANCIENT ROMAN & MODERN BRITISH MAXIM

'Quit India.'

—GANDHI

'Divide and . . . Quit India.'

—JINNAH

'On December 17, 1942, Lord Linlithgow, then Viceroy of India, made an historic announcement before the Associated Chambers of Commerce in Calcutta. 'Gentlemen', he declared at the end of his address, 'geographically India, for practical purposes, is one.'

This was indeed a terrific discovery after six years of sowing the seeds of dissension and disunity in India. No other Viceroy had so sedulously fostered the fissiparous tendencies in this country, pitted the various communities, parties, and interests against one another and applied the ancient maxim 'Divide and rule' with such success. It was under the wings of the late Viceroy that the two-nation theory was born and Pakistan grew from a fad into a faith. Linlithgow will have to account for much when the final balance sheet is struck between India and Britain.

Geographically India is one. Asoka knew it ; Alexander knew it ; Akbar knew it. But not Linlithgow until the fag-end of 1942. It is the fashion among Imperialists to talk of Hindustan as a sub-continent, as a hot-bed of religious strifes, and as a Babel of tongues. It is their boast that they hold the scales even among its warring tribes. They felt the need to justify this boast particularly since the Congress began to assert itself as a non-communal, mass organization representing the entire nation. They came out openly as patrons of reaction

and fomenters of schisms. It is a natural evolution from the 'command performance' demanding separate electorates in the days of Lord Minto to the 'demand performance' commanding Pakistan in the days of Linlithgow.

In 1940 Imperialism reaped its highest reward when the Muslim League adopted Pakistan as its creed. Even before that the League had begun to make a determined bid for power in the political vacuum created by the resignation of the Congress ministries. That very resignation was hailed as a deliverance both by the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha. For the British Government itself, here was a welcome offset to the loss of face created by the breakdown of the much-boasted Government of India Act within two and half years of its inauguration. Apart from that, the mutually destructive demands of the League and the Mahasabha could be themselves utilized to sabotage the Congress.

Congress was represented as a totalitarian body. Its authority, said Churchill after mobilizing all the machinery of Government to crush it, was denied by large and powerful elements in India. At the same time, the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha were being wooed. The League itself, though it had secured barely 108 out of 485 reserved Muslim seats in all the provinces in the 1937 elections, was being helped to form or rather to capture ministries. The Governors openly came out as the champions of the League and two Premiers—Allah Bukhsh in Sind and Fazlul Huq in Bengal—were high-handedly got rid of to make way for the League. The Pakistan map was being filled. Jinnah's empire was coming into shape. The Government had helped to divide and could now hope to rule.

Why then should Lord Linlithgow have suddenly made the discovery of India's geographical unity, and rubbed the League the wrong way? Was it only to take down the inflated ego of the Qaid-e-Azam a peg or two? Or had he begun dimly to realize that Pakistan would develop into a Frankenstein's monster which would one day destroy its own creator? Jinnah in spite of all the favours showered upon him was as unbending and obdurate as ever regarding active help in war. His ministries were no doubt committed to mobilize all the resources of their respective provinces for its effective prosecution—

without that understanding they could never have been formed ! —but the official policy of the League remained stiff-neckedly neutral. Even such a soldier-loyalist Premier as the late Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan was compelled by Jinnah to resign from the National Defence Council.

There are few persons in the world and none else in India who can play the game of power-politics with such consummate skill as Mahomed Ali Jinnah. The way he has transformed within a decade an amorphous body (as the League was in 1934) into the powerful party of 1944, and extricated himself out of every tight corner is an achievement at which a Machiavelli would have wondered. Particularly since the incarceration of Congress leaders, Jinnah has the political field to himself and he strides it like a Colossus with a monocle. He has lately begun to strike the unmistakable attitudes of a dictator and is giving as polished a performance as any.

During the last 21 months Jinnah has marched from success to success. He is now the master of four provincial ministries, the Fuehrer of the League, the unchallenged Qaid-e-Azam of the Muslim masses. There is no other Muslim leader (barring Moulana Azad, now behind prison bars) who can stand up to him. The ranks of nationalist Muslims have been sadly depleted since the death of men like Dr Ansari and Sherwani —and the murder of Allah Bukhsh ! The Communists who were both ideologically and organizationally fitted to give an enlightened lead to the Muslim masses have themselves become the unpaid propagandists of Pakistan, deluded by the suicidal assumption that self-determination is the same as Pakistan. They know what self-determination means in Russia but even Jinnah does not know how Pakistan will work out in India.

By rousing the fanatical and religious spirit of the Muslims, the League has drawn to itself a large section of the Muslim masses, instead of remaining a coterie of titled and leisured gentry. It has made considerable headway with its two-nation theory. Pakistan may be a mere slogan but it is a slogan which has siezed the imagination of the Muslim classes as well as masses. They see in it a mystical resuscitation of the *Hukumat-i-Ilahiya* and, in the mundane sphere, a revival of the glories of the Moghul Empire. The more flamboyant imagination already sees the Star and the Crescent flying from Kashmir

to Cape Comorin and Jinnah dispensing the *Shariat* from the Peacock Throne of Shah Jehan !

All this is deplorable from the nationalist point of view. From the larger, ideological angle, it is ludicrous in the midst of a world war between Fascism and Freedom. And even from the purely communal standpoint, the journey from Hindustan to Pakistan may well prove like the proverbial transition from the frying pan to the fire. Logic, however, has never killed a slogan and no dialectical arguments are going to wean Jinnah from Pakistan. The Hindu Mahasabha on the other hand is wedded to Akhand Hindustan, which also is in essence a slogan. The wisdom of a Solomon will be needed to find a way out of Akhand Hindustan and Pakistan.

Let us return to Lord Linlithgow's discovery that geographically India is one. It is a pity that though eighteen months have passed since that announcement, His Lordship has not been made even a fellow of the Royal Geographical Society ! On the contrary, howls of condemnation were raised against him in the camp of Pakistan. This indignation against the ex-Viceroy was shared by the Communists—and Rajaji. The former cried, 'So is Russia ! so what ?' while the latter felt like Tantalus who was denied the mixture of freedom-cum-Pakistan. Even the cheers from the Mahasabha ranks had a hollow ring about them. Geographically, for practical purposes, India may be one. But was it to so for the purpose of Akhand Hindustan ?—they wondered.

Linlithgow's speech marks the first decisive shift in British policy. After the fire, the fire-brigade ! Imperialism playing the old game had decided to cease patronizing and pampering the Muslim League. It had served its purpose as a counterpoise to the Congress. Jinnah in his blind opposition to the Congress had declared the August Resolution to be aimed as much against the Muslims as against the British. He had not merely stood out of the conflict. He was a non-belligerent, not a neutral. His moral or, to be more accurate, his power-politics sympathies were with the British Government. Linlithgow was grateful for this supreme service. Jinnah deserved all the ministries he asked for : Assam, Bengal, Sind, North-West Frontier, were his.

The Qaid-e-Azam continued to thunder for Pakistan. He

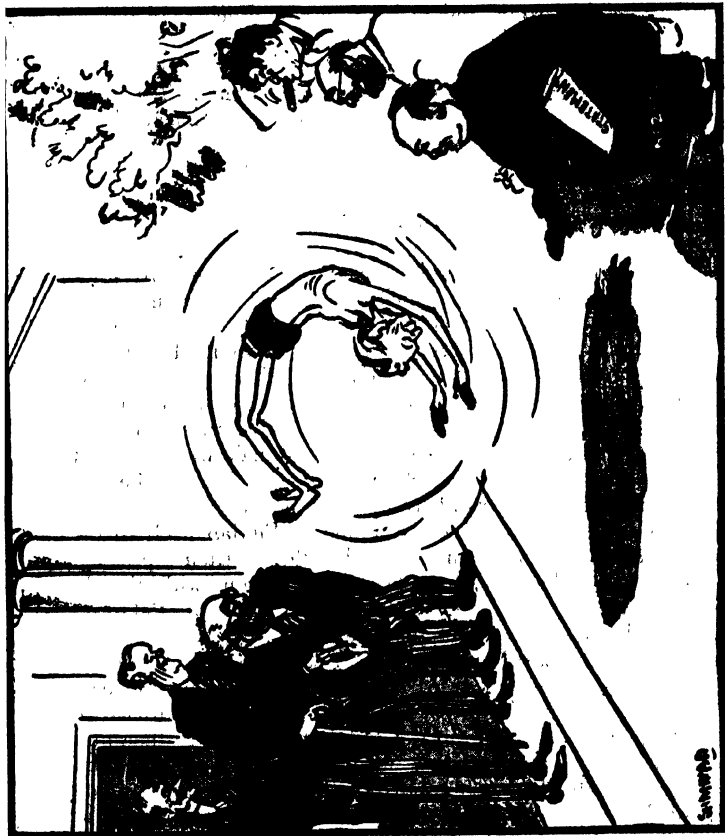
refused to fall into the Congress trap and to 'embroil the Muslim League to come into clash with the British Government' over Gandhiji's undelivered letter to him, though he had to eat his words and make a very un-Fuehrer-like show in this process.

On one historic occasion, however, he overreached himself and asked the British 'to divide and quit India'. This must have given an electric shock to the British Government. They would have liked to divide—only to rule India for all time. But here was Jinnah trying to kick down the ladder by which he had risen to power. The Congress demand for 'Quit India' had at least a moral integrity. But 'Divide and Quit India' was rank ingratitude.

One Viceroy went and another came. Wavell not only stuck to the geographical unity (which as a soldier he was naturally expected to do) but he extolled the Unionist Ministry in the Punjab, and dropped a broad hint that he would like to see coalition cabinets of its type established all over the country. Now Linlithgow's plea was purely passive; Wavell's was a positive line of action, a sort of Viceregal directive to non-Congress politicians. Moreover it hit Jinnah where it hurt most. He had the satisfaction of seeing Muslim League ministries installed everywhere—except the Punjab. And now Wavell was commending the example of Punjab itself to the rest of India. It was a danger signal to the Pakistan express.

The Punjab had all along been a sore point with Jinnah. It is considered to be the heart and soul of Pakistan. It owed lip allegiance to the League and the Qaid-e-Azam but for all practical purposes Sir Sikandar Hyat Khan, its astute Prime Minister, ruled the roost. Jinnah on his part was too seasoned a strategist to think of crossing swords with Sir Sikandar. He dare not, to put it bluntly. He therefore arrived at an understanding with the Punjab Premier by which the latter bound himself to follow the League mandate in all-India affairs while Jinnah on his part agreed not to meddle in the internal affairs of the Province.

This was the famous Jinnah-Sikandar pact of which we have heard so much lately. The sudden death of Sir Sikandar in 1943 and the growing influence of the League naturally made Jinnah cast a longing look at the Punjab. It was not



Mr. Innah makes a somersault over Gandhiji's letter addressed to him from

merely an anomaly that the Unionist Ministry should rule in that province ; it was an iron in the soul of Jinnah. Where would Pakistan be without its P ? He must put the coping stone to the house that he had built by capturing the Punjab. He must. He must.

It is an article of Jinnah's faith not to embroil himself in a clash with the British Government. (Incidentally it is also Savarkar's !) But in 1944 he felt himself sufficiently strong and powerful to pick up the glove thrown by Wavell. He would teach a lesson to the Viceroy. He would knock out the Unionist Ministry and instal a pure League Ministry in its place. In Bengal, Assam, the N.-W. Frontier and Sind, it was the British Governors who had obliged the League. In the Punjab, Jinnah would wrest his prize over the head of the Governor-General himself. The triumph would be solely his.

This is the background of the recent happenings in the Punjab. It was a fight not so much between Jinnah and Malik Khizr Hyat Khan Tiwana, as between Jinnah and the Government which had decided to back up the Punjab Premier. Imperialism had changed its tune and its protégés. When they wanted to crush the Congress, Jinnah was a handy and useful ally. But they would not trust the Punjab—the sword-arm of India—even to such an ally. Between Jinnah and the Tiwanas and the Chotu Rams, the latter got the bureaucratic biscuit. The British Government is always loyal to the loyalists.

It is generally believed that Jinnah had found his Waterloo in Lahore in April 1944. Few persons outside League circles have any sympathy for Jinnah in his present discomfiture. The man who coolly collected the spoils after the cavalier dismissal of two Premiers had no moral right to protest when a mere junior minister was similarly shown the door by the Governor. What was sauce for the goose should be sauce for the gander, too. Jinnah has been asking for it and he has now got it right in the neck—of Pakistan.

This is a short-sighted view, however justifiable it may be. For it is not Malik Khizr who has emerged victorious out of the fray but Bureaucracy and British Imperialism. By the same token, the defeat is not of Jinnah, but of the popular will. For perhaps the first time in his career, Jinnah had the undisputed backing of the masses behind him. For the



Retreat from Lahore !

April 1944

first time Jinnah was fighting against the Government and its henchmen, the zamindars, the knights and the *jo-hukums*. Ethically as well as politically, Jinnah's demand for a League ministry in the Punjab could be justified, whatever the exact constitutional and party position may be. If fresh elections are held in the Punjab tomorrow, the League would sweep the polls. And yet, Jinnah had to taste the dust of defeat.

The real enemy of the League is not the Congress, not even the Hindu Mahasabha (with which the League has occasionally shared its anti-Congress bed !) but Imperialism. Jinnah may have personally basked so long in the sunlight of success but the Muslim masses have shared the same privations and frustration as their Hindu brothers. The famine in Bengal did not distinguish between Hindu and Muslim, though there was a Muslim League ministry in office there. Nor will Imperialism distinguish between Hindustan and Pakistan, when it comes to its own continuation.

The sheer force of events has brought about certain changes in the structure and ideology of the Muslim League, which may one day bring it back to the path of unity. The rank and file of the League is discontented with the autocratic and plutocratic leadership, especially in the provincial sphere. It does not want to be ruled by the '400 families'. It is restive for action.

The first reactions of the Muslim press to Gandhiji's undelivered letter to Jinnah were unmistakably warm, though the Qaid-e-Azam hastily put the wet blanket upon them. Another straw in the wind was provided by the fruitful co-operation between the Congress Party and the League Party in the last Central Assembly session. And, finally, though Jinnah himself has kept his lips sealed, the Leaguers at large have almost unanimously expressed joy over Gandhiji's release.

All this is welcome. All this is significant. A leader has generally to set his pace according to the capacity of his followers. But in the case of the League, it is the followers who want to force the pace of the Leader, get out of the rut of sterility and negativism. Paradoxical as it may appear, his very defeat bears the seeds of victory if Jinnah sheds his

intransigence and faces reality. Let him no longer ask Britain to 'divide and quit'. Let him unite with the Congress and fight. Fight for the freedom both of Muslims and Hindus. For if subjection is our common lot, freedom too is indivisible !

CHAPTER VIII

ALL THAT MONEY CAN BUY !

'Go to now, you rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches are corrupted and your garments are moth-eaten ! Your gold and silver is cankered. . . .'

—THE BIBLE

'The plan, economic in purpose, also has had great political significance. Until lately many Indian industrialists contributed liberally to Mr Gandhi's Congress party, banked on it for political backing. Now they must bank on themselves and/or the British. When an Indian tycoon's man, Sir Ardeshir Dalal, joined the Viceroy's Council, it looked as though India's industrialists and India's Raj were going to bank on each other.'

—TIME (American newsmagazine)

On that fateful dawn of August 9, 1942, when the Bombay police, acting upon instructions from New Delhi, paid a call at a flat on Carmichael Road and put under arrest a man called Jawaharlal Nehru, they really arrested not one man but two men. One was Nehru, the beloved leader of nationalist India, feared by the Imperialists ; the other was Nehru, the Marxian Socialist, feared by the Indian capitalists.

Much to the silent annoyance of India's Men of Money, this man with a double personality had been steadily using his vast political influence to give the national movement a socialistic orientation. For fifteen years he had been busy at this 'game'. As early as 1929 when he presided over the Lahore Session, he had preached socialism from the Congress platform. It was then dismissed as the impetuosity of youth. But two years later at Karachi, this man went ahead by drafting and pushing through a resolution that guaranteed, among the Fundamental Rights of Citizens of Free India, not only uni-

versal adult suffrage but also the right to form trade unions, and 'a living wage, healthy conditions of work, limited hours of labour, suitable machinery for the settlement of disputes between employers and workmen, and protection against the economic consequences of old age, sickness, and unemployment'. And, most serious of all its provisions, the resolution declared that 'the State shall own or control key industries and services, mineral resources, railways, waterways, shipping, and other means of public transport.'

Since then he had dispelled even the hope of this resolution remaining a dead letter. He had been talking socialism as much as nationalism and filling the minds of peasants and workers with highly 'subversive' notions. He had used his position of influence in the Congress organization and his undoubted popularity with the people to propagate such ideas as that 'through socialism alone can we solve our economic problems', and that 'the capitalistic system of industry is no longer suited to the present methods of production.'

The Indian capitalists who had been supporting the movement for national freedom in the hope of securing better dividends in a free India where the foreign competition would be eliminated and all state encouragement given to indigenous industrial enterprise, were frankly dismayed. The movement for *political* freedom was in danger of being turned into a movement for an *economic* revolution. Their only hope lay in the socialist proving to be only a man of words. Let him talk—talk—talk while they, the Men of Money, planned and did things.

Again they were disappointed. Nehru persuaded the Congress to appoint a National Planning Committee to prepare an economic blue-print of free India. He himself was elected the Chairman of this Committee, and they saw with chagrin that among the personnel of the Committee he had not cared to give *them*, the rightful planners and doers of things, their rightful weightage; Nehru gave most of *their* seats to scholars, economists, scientists. It was, they admitted, not out-and-out a socialist committee, as many of the members owed allegiance to the doctrine of *laissez-faire* and private property. Yet, under Nehru's direction, the conclusions it arrived at looked to them dangerously like socialism.

Beginning with the principle that 'an essential pre-requisite of planning is complete freedom and independence for the country and the removal of all external control', the Committee warned against the creation of 'new vested interests' and went so far as to declare that

'in regard to defence industries, it was decided that they must be owned and controlled by the State. Regarding key industries the majority was of opinion that they should also be state-owned. In connexion with public utilities it was decided that they should be owned by some organ of the State. . . . In regard to other important and vital industries no definite rule was laid down but it was decided that the very nature of planning required some measure of control.'

With regard to the agricultural structure Nehru laid down that

'in India we have thought too long in terms of the upper groups and ignored the vast numbers of peasantry. This can no longer be done and the forgotten creature, the Indian peasant, who has borne so many grievous burdens for centuries, must find relief and secondly advancement in our plan.'

And the Committee came out with the revolutionary declaration that

'agricultural land, quarries, mines, etc., are forms of natural wealth which must vest absolutely in the people of India collectively. . . . No intermediaries of the type of *taluqdars* or *zamindars* should be recognized in any of these forms of natural wealth after the transition period is over.'

It stands to reason that any one who not only propounded such dangerous ideas but also threatened to put them into practice could not be the darling of the Indian capitalists, however much they might have had to tolerate or even flatter him for political reasons. His arrest and detention brought no tears to the eyes of the Men of Money. For on August 9, 1942, Indian capitalism was in a state of prosperity and exhilaration. Thanks to the war situation, there was a boom in industrial and commercial activity. The profits were enormous and were being shrewdly invested in newer industrial enterprises and

through accumulation, consolidation and expansion of capital, Indian capitalism was steadily moving towards monopoly capitalism of the western type. The mills and factories were working overtime to fulfil huge war contracts for Government departments, and in spite of the bonuses and increased wages grudgingly given to Labour, a rich harvest of dividends was being reaped. No longer was the representative Indian capitalist a *Seth* in a *pedhi*, owning one textile mill or an insurance company. Now, like an American tycoon, he controlled directly or indirectly a dozen or even more different industries. He sat in his air-conditioned office, an emperor of the new age, ruling the markets, manipulating prices, with tens of thousands of wage-slaves working in his mills and factories, and millions of consumers depending upon his sweet will for their economic needs.

Since August 1942, the process of investing the Indian capitalist with greater economic—and consequently political—power has gone steadily apace. Before us lie two full-page advertisements appearing in a Bombay political weekly which tell their own story. The first declares that Birla Brothers are the Managing Agents for Kesoram Cotton Mills Ltd., Birla Cotton Spinning and Weaving Mills Ltd., Birla Cloth Mills Ltd., Sutlej Cotton Mills Ltd., Birla Cotton Factory Ltd., Jiyajeerao Cotton Mills Ltd., Gwalior ; New Asiatic Life Assurance Co., Ltd., Ruby General Insurance Co., Ltd., Orient Paper Mills, Ltd., ; Birla Jute Manufacturing Co., Ltd., Hind Cycles Ltd.; Indian Shipping Co., Ltd.; Premier Stores Supply Co., Ltd.; and Textile Machinery Corporation Ltd. This vast industrial empire extends over several provinces and states. And it has only to be added that one of these Birla Brothers is Ghanshyamdas Birla who owns *Hindustan Times*, the most influential nationalist paper in the North, as well as *The Eastern Economist*, a sedate-looking financial weekly which serves as a veritable house organ for Birla Brothers, Ltd. Recently he is reported to have acquired *The Searchlight* of Patna, and *The Leader* of Allahabad. (Of course, it would be imprudent to advertize these four concerns along with the fourteen listed above !)

The other advertisement informs us that Karam Chand Thapar and Bros. Ltd., are the Managing Agents of Oriental

Coal Co., Ltd. (Begonia and Badjana Collieries), Real Jambad Coal Co., Ltd. (Real Jambad Colliery), Poniat Collieries Ltd. (Poniat Colliery), Eastern Syndicate Ltd. (West and New Badjana Collieries), Rawanwara Collieries Ltd. (Rawanwara Khas Colliery), Madhuband Colliery, Kasta & Bihar Collieries Ltd. (Korabad, Borkuri and Poriapur Collieries); Bharat Starch and Chemicals Ltd., Shree Sitaram Sugar Co., Ltd., Deoria Sugar Mills Ltd., Unao Distilleries Ltd. (manufacturing liquor), Shree Gopal Paper Mills, Orient Commercial Co., Ltd., The National Security Assurance Co., Ltd., The Mahabir Insurance Co., Ltd., Chief Agency of Norwich Union Fire Insurance Society, Ltd., Karamchand Thapar & Sons, Ltd., The Insulcrete Co. of India Ltd., Dry Ice and Refrigerators, Ltd. We are further informed that the Managing Director of all this commercial net-work is Lala Karamchand Thapar and that the telegraphic address of the head-office of this highly materialistic empire is 'SPIRITUAL'. Lala Karamchand Thapar, one is led to conclude, is a humourist with a strongly-developed sense of irony !

Does one want to get more examples of the alarming concentration of economic power ? One has only to go round the corner to Bombay House, the headquarters of the House of Tatas, presided over by the youthful-looking J. R. D. Tata.

A glance at the sign-boards in the entrance hall would be enough. A Tata advertisement informs us that the total capital investment of the company is 71 crores, employees are 109,000, wage and salary bill is 6 crores per annum, and that it owns and controls, besides the famous Tata Iron and Steel Works at Jamshedpur, the Tata Air Lines, Tata Textile Mills, Hydro-Electric Power Generators, Tata Chemicals, Oil Mills, Soap Factories—and the Taj Mahal Hotel !

So much about economic power. What about political influence ? Some of them are already in control of important political journals with wide circulations and there is a feverish move on the part of others to acquire some more. With the idea of trying to appear nationalistic and using their money to gain power in a future free India, Capitalists have gone out of their way to pay lip-sympathy to the Congress and subscribe to funds and to place their bungalows at the disposal of the Congress executive. We are not naive enough to believe that

such hospitality confers no indirect advantages on them. Considering the fact that the slightest indisposition of Gandhiji or of any important Congress leader, or the merest whisper of a political move on their part, is enough to unsettle the stock market, surely a Big Business family would give anything to have India's national leaders stay with them.

And can the head of a capitalistic organization wish for anything better than to have in his employment a former Socialist leader like M. R. Masani who can write and publish pamphlets on Socialism which uphold the doctrine of 'trusteeship of the owners of property' as against Nehru's advocacy of the nationalization of industry?

However, an interview by an American journalist with Gandhiji shows that so far they have not quite succeeded:

'What proportion of Congress funds,' Gandhiji was once asked by this American journalist, 'is covered by rich Indians?' The following, if quoted correctly, is Gandhiji's answer and the supplementary questions and answers.

'Practically all of it,' he stated. 'In this *ashram*, for instance, we could live much more poorly than we do and spend less money. But we do not, and the money comes from our rich friends.'

'Doesn't the fact that Congress gets its money from the moneyed interests affect Congress policy?' I asked.

'Doesn't it create a kind of moral obligation?'

'It creates a silent debt,' he said, 'but actually we are very little influenced by the thinking of the rich.'

We have little hesitation in taking Gandhiji's word for it.

If at all there was a doubt, in any quarters, about the hollowness of Big Money's sympathy for the cause of national freedom, they have been set at rest during the last twenty-one months: whenever the Congress creed or Gandhian doctrine has conflicted with its self-interest, it has thrown its Congress affiliations overboard without hesitation.

Compared with the profits of 1940, the profits of the Textile Industry have increased fifteen-fold and twenty-fold. Yet these 'convenient sympathizers' of the Congress have not hesitated, with the connivance of the Government, to raise the bogey of a cloth famine, to hoard vast stocks of cloth, and to fleece the

people by prices which were exorbitantly high, compared even with the prices of other goods which had shot up because of real scarcity. For as the profits of the millowners grew, the Excess Profits Tax mulcted by the Government increased, so that when the millowners got lakhs, the Government got crores—at the expense of the already hard-pressed people !

And the Textile Industry is only one instance among many. All industrialists have grabbed at their fattening shares of profits, and simultaneously played the tax-collector to the Government at the cost of the poor consumers.

How then can they reconcile their professions with their practice ? By doing what many Bombay mills did after the August 1942 disturbances—by flying a national tricolour on the mills which were working day and night to fulfil Government war contracts ! Or by doing what many of the Ahmedabad mills did—closing down ostensibly as a protest *hartal*, when it was obviously in their interests to stop production and force up the prices in the market ! In any case, no credit belongs to them for their ‘patriotism’ !

But nothing that they have done so far has so well exposed the game of the capitalists as the 10,000 Crore Plan they cooked up at a time when all national leaders were in jail. The authors of the Plan are Sir Purshottamdas Thakurdas, J. R. D. Tata, G. D. Birla, Sir Ardeshir Dalal, Sir Shri Ram, Kasturbhai Lalbhai, A. D. Shroff and Dr John Matthai. The booklet which sets forth their joint prescription for India’s economic ills begins with a patronizing reference to ‘the National Planning Committee to whose labours the conception of a planned economy for India is largely due’ and then proceeds to offer a plan that is the very antithesis of Nehru’s conceptions of national planning. Not only is there no reference to any possibility of limitation of profits, but the whole question of distribution of national wealth has been left untouched. While the Congress is pledged to socialization of key industries and the National Planning Committee envisages the same process, the Tata-Birla Plan is conveniently vague on the question of ownership and control of industry.

Where the Congress and the National Planning Committee want radical changes in the agrarian economy and

even Gandhiji wants the peasants 'to seize the land'—*confiscation without compensation* as, according to him, 'it would be financially impossible for anybody to compensate the landlords'—the Tata-Birla group of Capitalists wants to introduce surface-scratching reforms without relieving the over-burdened peasantry of the crushing weight of the landlord and the usurer. Both in the sphere of industry and agriculture, they want to perpetuate the present unjust economic order. Yet they want the State to finance and inaugurate their plan—in other words, to help them to expand their industrial activities, to turn Birlas and Tatas into Fords and Rockfellers! They only want doubling of the *per capita* income which can be achieved by making the rich (of their class) richer without appreciably raising the standard of living of the common man. The emergence of ten millionaires as billionaires can raise the *per capita* income of the country but how is it going to help the half-starved peasant and the sweated labourer?

The political assumptions of the Plan include 'a national government . . . which will be vested with full freedom in economic matters'. This is understandable. The Indian capitalist realizes today that the rate of profit cannot be increased in view of increasing accumulation of capital and narrowing field of exploitation due to increased internal competition. He, therefore, seeks increase in gross profits. But his way is blocked by an unsympathetic alien bureaucracy, while his future is threatened by gigantic plans being made by British and American capitalists for the economic domination of the world. He, therefore, needs a bourgeois national government to protect him against foreign capital and produced goods as well as to finance his plans for increased productivity. But at the same time he is not merely going to wait for the future. If there are no immediate prospects of the establishment of a national government he will, meanwhile, try to make a concordat with the bureaucracy as, indeed, the planners actually did. They went to New Delhi to discuss the Plan with the finance wizards of the Government of India and at least three of them accepted the Government's invitation to fly to the United Kingdom along with some other industrialists 'for discussions with representatives of British

industry in connexion mainly with capital goods required for post-war industrial development in India.' That such 'discussions' were expected to be advantageous to Britain was shown by a London report to the effect that 'London city circles are greatly excited over the forthcoming visit of the Indian Industrialists,' and quoting from the *London Times*, 'three letters of about a column length, advocating the necessity of Britain's economic friendship with India.'

Meanwhile, in spite of the insistence on the prerequisite of a national government to implement the Plan, one of them, Sir Ardeshir Dalal, even agreed to join the Viceroy's Executive Council and thus become a cog in the bureaucratic machinery. Was the 10,000 crore Plan officially adopted as a part of the Wavell Deal? The industrialists were about to leave for England when something happened to upset their plans—and the Plan! Gandhiji was released. Promptly the trip was postponed. And some days later Sir Purshottamdas Thakurdas, Mr J. R. D. Tata and Seth G. D. Birla were seen *together* going to Juhu where they had an hour's talk with Gandhiji. Afterwards, Mr Tata told the Press that it was a purely courtesy visit! Yet the press report went on to say that the 'visitors may avail themselves of another opportunity when Gandhiji recovers to discuss their plan with him. Today only passing references to the plan were understood to have been made.' Asked whether the booklet adumbrating the 15-year plan of the Bombay industrialists had been shown to Gandhiji Sir Purshottamdas said that 'it must have reached him earlier.'

You bet it must have—bound in *ersatz* Khadi!

One can appreciate these capitalists' anxiety to get the blessings of Gandhiji—before Nehru comes out of jail to upset their apple-cart! Gandhiji is known to be opposed to class warfare, believing that Labour and Capital 'should be a great family living in unity and harmony, capital not only looking to the material welfare of the workers but their moral welfare also—capitalists being trustees for the welfare of the classes under them.' And the Capitalists believe that they can, therefore, get the Mahatma to entrust the economic future of the country to their hands.

But, while Gandhiji is busy acquainting himself with different aspects of the political situation, surely he will give

his attention to the economic situation also. The record of capitalistic activity during the last 21 months is there—etched in bold, ugly relief ! The grain-hoarders of Bengal, the cloth profiteers of Bombay and Ahmedabad, the mill-owners who refused to pay dearness allowances to their workers, the industrialists who have been fattening on war contracts and hobnobbing with the Government and with British capitalists—is their record such that they can be entrusted with the welfare of millions of workers ? Can the hoarders and profiteers be expected to look after the ‘*moral*’ welfare of labouring classes under them ? The trusteeship theory needs to be revised in the light of the grim tragedy of Bengal—if nothing else !

The capitalists have produced a plan and want Gandhiji’s blessings for it. But they forget that he too has had an economic plan. And unlike their plan which is concerned only with production (and profits !), his plan is one of distribution. Here are its salient points :

‘God created man to work for his food, and said that those who ate without work were thieves.

‘We should be ashamed of having a square meal so long as there is one able-bodied man or woman without work or food.

‘I do not fight shy of capital. I fight capitalism. The West teaches me to avoid concentration of capital. . . .

‘The difficulty is that whilst today capital is organized and seems to be securely entrenched, labour is not. . . .

‘My ideal is equal distribution, but so far as I can see it is not to be realized. I, therefore, work for equitable distribution.’

Tested on this touch-stone, the 10,000 crore Plan is exposed to be what it is—a capitalistic device for increased ‘concentration of capital’ which Gandhiji wants to avoid ; a plan which makes not even a pretence of providing ‘equitable distribution’ which Gandhiji desires ! How securely capital seeks to entrench itself !

With their 10,000 crores the Tata-Birla planners can get *all that money can buy*—power and capital goods, industrial plant from England and America, foreign experts, new factories, generators, turbines, looms and lathes. They can even buy the goodwill and support of foreign capitalists and in-



The Magic Mirror !

1 March 1944

dustrialists by pandering to the international cartels and trusts that threaten to rule the world. But with all their money they cannot buy a Plan. For a Plan, a real Plan for economic development of a whole people, needs a social vision. More than machines, it needs men. And these men must have faith in the Plan and—the Planners !

India needs a plan. A two-meal plan ! A plan for equitable distribution ! Such a plan needs the inspiration of Gandhiji's humanitarianism and the practical socialist approach of Nehru. Such a plan will be worked not by a coterie of capitalists but by the National Planning Committee, representing the people. For, ultimately it is only the people who make a Plan and carry it to success.

CHAPTER IX

MAKE GANDHI THE ALLY OF THE ALLIES !

'Justice is not what my lawyer tells me I may do as to how England should deal with menacing Americans, but what humanity, reason and justice tell me what I ought to do'

—EDMUND BURKE

(Written during the American War of Independence)

On May 6, 1944 the Indian people heaved a big sigh of relief when they read the news that Mahatma Gandhi had been released. That relief was no doubt prompted by the keen anxiety for the personal health of the beloved leader ; but also it was in no small measure due to the concern for the political health of the nation.

Gandhiji is out ; Gandhiji will find a way out !—That was the one thought that surged up in the minds of millions of men and women. A touching thought, a wishful thought, maybe. But a thought which penetrated the fog that had lain thick for the last 21 months, dispelled the frustration, and illumined the entire Indian landscape.

Weeks have passed since Gandhiji's release. Thanks to the

unremitting care of his doctors and the unrelenting watch of Sarojini Naidu—the nightingale has become the eagle!—he has been partially restored to health. A nation's prayer has been answered. But a nation's hope still remains unfulfilled. Relief has given place to a sense of reality. Amery has robbed Wavell of the grace of Gandhiji's release by harping upon its medical grounds—as only Amery can harp. Wavell himself, though anxious to meet Gandhiji face to face ever since he became India's Commander-in-Chief, according to the testimony of Eve Curie,¹ has not yet followed up his first dramatic gesture by inviting him to the Viceroy's House, clad not in sackcloth and ashes but in his usual loin-cloth. Jinnah is nursing his wounded vanity in a house-boat in Kashmir.

And the Mahatma himself as he looks at the waves which ripple over the Juhu sands feels unhappy and oppressed. He confessed in a letter to Dr Jayakar :

'The country expects much from me. I am not at all happy. I feel even ashamed. I should not have fallen ill. I tried not to, but failed at length. I feel that they will imprison me as soon as I am declared free from the present weakness. And if they do not arrest me, what can I do? I cannot withdraw the August resolution. As you have very properly said, it is innocuous. You may differ about the sanction. It is the breath of life for me!'

The publication of this letter has created diverse reactions in India and abroad—from a welling sympathy for Gandhiji in the heavy burden he bears, to the cheap gibe of a British paper that he is aspiring to be a martyr! The letter, however, serves as a mirror to Gandhiji's mind and its dispassionate perusal will help to destroy the illusions many of us have been entertaining since his release. Nay, it obliquely reveals the difficulties that face Gandhiji. It is not as if he has only to say *open sesame* for the political deadlock to end. It is not as if he has merely to call on Jinnah for the communal problem to be solved. It is not as if he has just to journey to woebegone Bengal for famine and pestilence to slink away.

1. See '*A Journey Among Warriors*', p. 462.

Gandhiji must tackle and triumph over all these difficulties. He cannot just throw up his hands and confess failure. That is a denouement too tragic to contemplate. For Gandhiji is the symbol of our hopes and aspirations, the embodiment of the time-spirit. As long as he lives, bond or free, the nation will pin its hope and faith in him. He cannot fail the nation—not Gandhiji !

Gandhiji by himself cannot create a new earth and a new heaven. It takes two to make a quarrel and many to solve a deadlock. The British Government cannot point an accusing finger at the August resolution and expect Gandhiji to eat it word by word to the chant of *mea culpa, mea culpa*. Even if it was not 'the breath of life' for him (as he said in his letter to Jayakar) he has no right to withdraw 'it behind the back of his comrades like Azad and Nehru and thousands of nameless others who are still rotting in jail. That would amount to a downright betrayal, of which Gandhiji can never be guilty. Those, therefore, who ask Gandhiji to withdraw that resolution or even to treat it as a dead letter must also ask the Government for a general amnesty and jail delivery. That would itself create the psychological background necessary for a re-appraisal of the situation in the light of today. The writers of this booklet are political realists and they see nothing intrinsically heinous or sacrosanct about that resolution. If another way out is possible, it should certainly be explored. But to expect Gandhiji to act in isolation and under moral duress as it were is sheer vindictiveness.

By now we have heard *ad nauseam* that Gandhiji was released solely on medical grounds. We promise not to forget that basic postulate of Leo Amery as long as we live. If, however, the Government is at all anxious to end the deadlock, why not talk less of malaria and more of a solution of the present impasse ? That tiny anopheles which bit the Mahatma and brought his recent ailment is assured of an abiding place in history if a *via media* for Indo-British rapprochement is found after his present release. If, on the contrary, Government sticks to its malarial-cum-strategic terrain and merely calls upon Gandhiji to raise the white flag of surrender, a fatal might-have-been will have been written across the scroll of history.

It is high time that Lord Wavell finally decided whether to become the political successor of Lord Allenby and do for India what his hero did for Egypt, or merely a glorified commissionaire of Churchill, and guard the brightest gem in the British crown. He has been long enough in India to size up the situation. He is surrounded by bureaucrats and careerists but has not yet become a part of the steel frame as his last two predecessors had become. He can still ignore red-tape and act on the spur of the moment. India is grateful for what he has done for Bengal and for the release of Mahatma Gandhi, though it was purely on medical grounds : we had no hope even of that much humanity since the death of Kasturba in detention.

Lord Wavell is credited with the desire of giving a Wavell Deal to India. He wants this country to march with the speed of the serviceable jeep at least. He wants a network of good roads and aerodromes, a prosperous peasantry, improvement in public health, rapid industrialization. All this is to the good. The Viceroy, however, is significantly silent about the political content of his new deal. Not merely that but the stray hints he has dropped in his speeches so far are not exactly heartening. The more is the necessity, therefore, that he should soon have a heart-to-heart talk with Gandhiji. Gandhi is the biggest thing in India, as Lord Linlithgow once confessed to an American correspondent. He will gladly extend his co-operation to Wavell in his programme of national regeneration. But if that programme is itself intended as a counterblast to the Congress, if Wavell hopes to inaugurate his new deal with one hand while continuing the old policy of repression with the other, disillusionment will not be long in coming. Let the Viceroy not forget the old maxim that good government is no substitute for self-government.

While in detention Gandhiji is reported to have prepared a formidable rejoinder to the indictment levelled against him in particular and the Congress in general in the Government publication '*Congress Responsibility for Disturbances*'. The publication of this authoritative reply will no doubt help to vindicate the Congress and is thus looked forward to keenly. But it is really unnecessary for Gandhiji to waste his breath in proving that he is as much anti-Fascist as ever. For the

democratic world never doubted it in spite of all the Maxwells and Puckles in the world. And if Wavell (like Linlithgow) finds it difficult to accept Gandhiji's own word, let him accept the word of a fellow-Field Marshal, Smuts, whom Churchill himself honours so highly : 'It is sheer nonsense to talk of Mahatma Gandhi as a "Fifth Columnist"'. He is a great man. He is one of the great men of the world, and he is the last person to be placed in that category. He is dominated by high spiritual ideals.'

The biographer of Allenby will find many useful parallels between the Egyptian situation which faced Allenby, and the Indian situation which faces him today. He will find similar lessons in the history of Ireland. Wavell may well contemplate the spectacle of a Wafdist leader like Nahas Pasha (who was as anti-British as any Congress leader today) holding the peace and helping the British to his utmost even while Rommel was knocking on the gates of Egypt, and of the neutral De Valera serving like a thorn in Britain's side for five long years—and even cocking a snook at Uncle Sam himself, who was a real uncle to him in his rebel days.

That reminds one of the famous letter which De Valera wrote to Lloyd George (then British Prime Minister) on August 10, 1921 :

'Ireland's right to choose for herself the path she shall take to realise her own destiny must be accepted as indefeasible... As regards the question at issue between the political minority and the great majority of the Irish people, that must remain a question for the Irish people themselves to settle. We cannot admit the right of the British Government to mutilate our country, either in its own interest or at the call of any section of her population : We do not contemplate the use of force. If your Government stands aside, we can effect a complete reconciliation. We agree with you that no common action can be secured by force.... We have no conditions to impose, no claims to advance but the one that we may be freed from aggression.'

If we exchange the word India for Ireland, this may well form the gist of the letter which Gandhiji may write to Lord Wavell in June 1944. What reply will he give ? Point to

the August Declaration, Cripps Proposals or merely ask Gandhiji to consult his own conscience again? If that is all the reply he has to give, he will be merely declaring the bankruptcy of statesmanship in New Delhi, of the Wavell Deal itself. Nor can he merely repeat the parrot-cry of the exigencies of war. For Gandhiji has always been ready to make the maximum concessions for the effective prosecution of war if the substance of freedom is offered to India. Nay, Gandhiji will undertake to create a national psychology of resistance to the enemy within the border which itself will be of priceless help to the Allied armies fighting the Japs.

Apart from this there is the ideological, moral factor. A war which has to be fought with the detention of sturdy democrats like Gandhiji and Nehru and the buttering of a Fascist stooge like Franco is suspect in the eyes of all right-thinking people. The *Manchester Guardian* struck a timely note while commenting on Gandhiji's release: 'British tradition asserts, there can be no happiness without liberty. Now whatever else Mr Gandhi is or is not, he certainly is a friend, a champion of human liberty. There is then hope that he may yet be our ally. His alliance would be worth securing. For this is a war in which personality counts and old or young, ill or well, Mr Gandhi is by far the most powerful personality in India.' That would be a good motto for Wavell: *Make Gandhi Britain's Ally!* An even better motto would be: *Make Gandhi The Ally of the Allies!*

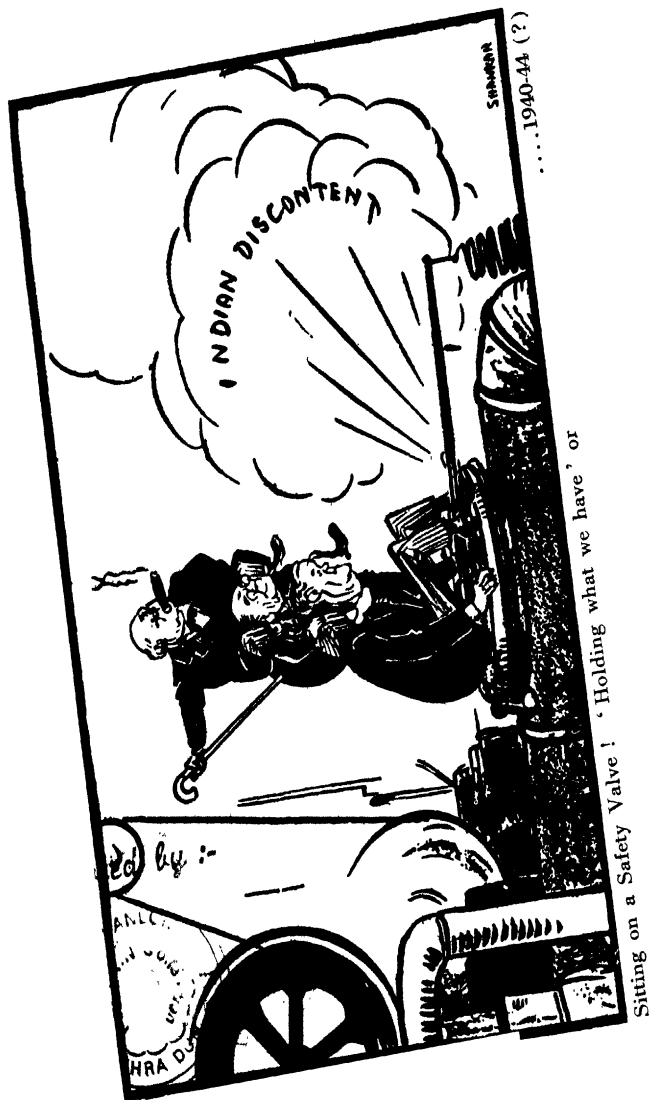
If we put the question of freedom in the forefront, it is not because we underrate the need of communal unity. Of course without that unity there can never be any lasting redemption of India. But the belief that if Gandhiji and Jinnah compose their differences and call upon the Viceroy arm-in-arm, he will at once hand over the keys of India to them, is itself a big delusion.

British Imperialism always sheds crocodile tears for our disunity but it does not mean that our unity will *ipso facto* send it into liquidation. Divide and rule—while loudly deploring the divisions! Our unity-wallahs ignore the glaring fact that the failure of the Cripps Mission (which directly led to the 'Quit India' resolution) was not caused by Hindus and Muslims not coming together but by Britain's refusal to

trust the Hindu as well as the Muslim and the Sikh and the Christian and the Parsi and the Anglo-Indian and the Scheduled Caste—all united together in one camp—with real freedom during the pendency of the war.

We yield to none in our anxiety for communal unity but the constant harping upon it only helps to divert attention from our main ideal—political liberty. It also strengthens the hands of reactionaries, obscurantists and quislings. We feel that freedom itself will be the solvent of disunity—especially at a moment in our history when that freedom has to be simultaneously wrested from unwilling hands and protected from a grasping foe. We are entirely for a meeting—and a fruitful meeting—between Gandhiji and Jinnah but it should not be a meeting only for haggling over the vague map of Pakistan but for winning our freedom from the British and protecting it from the Japs. Without freedom, Hindustan and Pakistan will remain only different cells of the same prison.

Gandhiji has stepped out from the smaller to the bigger prison. Will he find a way out to freedom? Or will he be driven by the powerful forces arrayed against him to step back and find a sanctuary behind the stone walls and barbed wire of the Aga Khan's palace? If he is compelled to go back, God help India and Britain—Britain more than India!



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